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**Understanding School Cultures:
Developing Participation**

2002

**Thesis submitted for the degree of
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In this thesis I examine the relationship between school cultures and participation. I start by describing the three methodological approaches I have taken to explore these two key concepts. First, I discuss the reading I have undertaken for the study. Second, by reflecting on my existing experiences of schools and education, I present a series of autobiographical tales. Third, I provide an in-depth case study of a single school.

The study of this urban comprehensive school comprises the main part of the empirical work. By working as a learning support assistant whilst researching at the school I was able to observe closely its cultures and their relationship to processes of and barriers to participation. I focus on three aspects of this relationship: *Interacting with External Worlds*, *Forming Relationships within the Institutional Structures of a School* and *Supporting Classroom Learning: Valuing Diversity?*

Through an analysis of the findings from my reading, autobiographical fragments and the case study, I am able to redefine the key concepts of the thesis and establish six principal conclusions. I argue that the concept of school cultures is central to understanding participation and that the successful development of more participatory policies and practices requires a concomitant shift in school cultures. I note the importance of understanding members' values and beliefs and suggest that at the heart of developing participation is first, the nature of relationships between members and second, responses to diversity.

I end the thesis with a critique of the study's methodology and a number of recommendations for further research. Finally, I consider the contribution this thesis has made to an understanding of the process of research through its intention to maintain integrity both within and between its methodological approaches and its conceptual development.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING THE THESIS

"The main interest in life and work is to become someone else you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think you would have the courage to write it?"
(Foucault, 1988, p.9)

I came across this comment by Foucault when I was about midway through the thesis. It was the second sentence that caught my eye: it made me laugh, wryly. At the time I was drowning in a sea of half-formed ideas, endless lists of yet-to-be-read books and articles, and a daunting sense of doubt about what I would "*say at the end*". Over the last year or so, as I have grappled with those ideas and read (most of) the books and articles on my lists, I am more sure of that ending. Now it is the first half of his remark that haunts me more. Producing a thesis has challenged and changed me, letting me "*become someone else I was not in the beginning*" both in my "*life and work*". The purpose of Chapter One is to introduce the key elements of this development. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first I outline the research questions for the study. In the second section I provide an introduction to myself as a researcher: my values and understanding of the purposes and nature of research. In the final section I discuss how the thesis is structured.

Starting Points (1): Introducing the Study

This section provides some starting points for the study. I explain why I framed these particular research questions, how they have directed my

research and the main methodological approaches I have used to address them. I then introduce the two key concepts on which the questions are based: 'school cultures' and 'participation'. These are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, *Reading to Develop Conceptual Understandings*.

Framing the research questions

The concept of school culture has exercised the thoughts of sociologists and educationalists for many years, from Waller who, in 1932, highlighted the "separate culture of the school" (p.108), to works published more recently, such as Prosser (1999) and Alexander (2000). However, agreements over definitions and understandings have proved elusive. As Prosser explains:

"The term 'school culture' is popular and frequently used but despite over thirty years of research it remains enigmatic and much abused."

(ibid., p.1)

A starting point for this study was my strong dissatisfaction with how the concept was presented in educational discourses: both formally in texts and more informally in classroom and staffroom discussions. Explanations often seemed inadequate, superficial, confused and confusing with a bewildering mixture of terminology: not only 'school culture' but also 'school ethos', 'climate' and 'atmosphere'. I was unclear about what each represented and how they differed from one another.

At the same time, my teaching and research experiences over the last twenty years have reinforced for me the importance of understanding this concept as a key to finding out what really goes on inside a school. I particularly wanted to know why the cultures of some schools are more successful than others at encouraging the learning and participation of students and staff. I also wanted to explore what barriers existed to the learning and participation of students

and staff within the cultures of schools. The following research questions for the study, as summarised in Figure 1:1, eventually grew from these initial thoughts.

Figure 1:1 Summary of the research questions

1. What are school cultures?
2. What is participation?
3. To what extent can the concept of school cultures contribute to the understanding and development of participation in schools?

The purpose of questions one and two is to explore the study's key concepts of school cultures and participation. However, the focus of my research interest lies in bringing together these concepts so as to examine the nature of the relationship between them. This is addressed in question three, which considers how far and in what ways the concept of school cultures can contribute to understanding and developing participation in schools. This final question is, therefore, the overarching aim of the study.

Addressing the research questions

I have addressed these questions in three main ways. First, I have read and considered other people's writings on the subjects, both within and beyond education. My findings from this are discussed in Chapter Three, *Reading to Develop Conceptual Understandings*. Second, I have drawn on and examined my own experiences of schools and education. These are presented as a series of autobiographical fragments in Chapter Four, *Autobiographical Tales*. These two approaches, reading and considering my existing experiences, informed

each other and together provided a basis from which the third and main element of the study emerged.

I chose to look at one school in depth to allow me to scrutinise and develop further my theoretical understandings. This became the case study of Bowden School, the findings from which are discussed in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight of the thesis. I worked in this urban comprehensive school for six months as a learning support assistant (LSA) on a voluntary basis. In exchange for my time I was given the opportunity to observe closely Bowden's cultures and ways in which students and staff were included and excluded from participating in the life of the school.

Taking on the role of LSA gave me a privileged position to find out about the school. My place in any classroom was accepted by students and staff alike, as was my presence elsewhere in the school: in the staffroom, canteen, offices and playgrounds. Staff and students chatted informally to me and to each other in my company. They let down their guard, related humorous anecdotes, complained, lost their tempers and looked bored. Gaps and inconsistencies in my findings were more easily identifiable. I had opportunities to check and recheck my emerging understanding of the school. The methodological justifications for this case study, as well as for the other two approaches I used to address my research questions, are explored in detail in Chapter Two, *Methodological Considerations*.

Key concept: school cultures

School cultures have features that are common to all cultures. For example, they are shaped by their past, present and possibilities for their futures

(Williams, 1997). They are therefore, paradoxically, both sustained and changeable. All cultures have metaphorical and sometimes literal boundaries and these may be more, or less, permeable with and to other cultures (Sibley, 1994; Bhabha, 1995). Cultures may be understood in terms of identity and belonging, language and ideology, power and control and notions of 'normal' and 'other' behaviours. The interrelationship between cultures and individuals' lives is complex. It can be partly understood in terms of the social structures by which people identify themselves, or are identified by others, such as gender, class, ethnicity, dis/ability and so forth. However, such an interpretation, by ignoring the complexity and multiplicity of individuals' *"lived experiences"* (Thompson, 1978), is in danger of being both reductionist and deterministic. As Erben notes, it is necessary to recognise that *"individual motivations and social influences have no easy demarcation"* (1998, p.1).

Prosser distinguishes between the *"generic culture"* of schools, as being recognisably different from those of other institutions such as hospitals and prisons, and the *"unique culture"* of any single school (1999, pp.7-8). This distinction is important. In the thesis I set out to establish cultural features that schools share as well as to explore those which make each individual school different from any other. However, unlike Prosser I use the term 'cultures' in the plural, rather than the singular 'culture', to signify that schools are complex places in which multiple cultures co-exist. All members of a school belong to a number of cultures simultaneously and these may make conflicting demands upon them (DfEE, 2000, p.41). This is not the same as the notion of sub-cultures as referred to, for example, in studies on "staff cultures" (e.g. Hargreaves, 1994 and Nias *et al*, 1989) or "student cultures" (e.g. Stanley, 1989, Woods, 1990 and Deal, 1985). Such approaches suggest

that 'sub' cultures are merely component parts of a single overarching 'main' culture.

A school is a multi-layered and shifting social place, experienced differently by different people within it. It exists in a world beyond its playgrounds and gates. Local and national politics contribute to the cultures of a school. Students and staff also bring with them the rest of their lives: their beliefs and values formed by families and homes, friendships and previous educational experiences. How people identify themselves, and are identified by others, both reflect and shape the cultures of a school, and its policies and practices are demonstrations of how students and staff are valued and devalued within those cultures. I have tried to reflect these complexities in the thesis. Booth and Ainscow describe how educational research may represent schools in a way in which there is:

"A distortion of reality, an avoidance of reports of the messiness and inconsistencies of real schools and real lives, and the swirling contradictions of particular cultures and minds". (1997, p.2)

This study specifically sets out to explore such "*messiness and inconsistencies*" as a means by which I can more fully understand the cultures of schools.

Key concept: participation

During the course of this study I contributed to a project that resulted in the publication of the *Index of Inclusion* (Booth, et al, 2000). This is described as:

"A set of materials to support schools in a process of inclusive school development." (ibid., p.2)

My involvement in this undertaking shaped, and was shaped by, my research and I draw on the *Index* in this section here. However, I have avoided the use

of the terms inclusion and exclusion in the thesis because of their association with the physical presence and absence of students in a school. Nevertheless, there are close links between the concepts of 'participation' and 'inclusion', as there are between 'barriers to participation' and 'exclusion', as explored in the following quotation.

"Inclusion in education involves the processes of increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools." (ibid., p.12)

Participation is about including all students and staff in all aspects of a school and is not only concerned with overt learning and teaching in classrooms. It is embedded in a school's formal policies and practices as well as in the countless everyday interactions that take place amongst its members. Likewise barriers to participation are about excluding students and staff from any aspect of a school's life. Barriers may be both literal - for example, limiting access to buildings or the curriculum - as well as metaphorical - such as, acts of intolerance and discrimination. Increasing participation necessarily reduces barriers to participation and vice versa. These interlinking processes are never static because schools, and the worlds in which they exist, are also susceptible to change. It is therefore meaningless for a school to describe itself as being fully participatory.

The concept of participation is not confined to a specific group, or groups, of students only. I do not use the phrase 'special educational needs' in this thesis except when I am referring to others' use of it within my fieldwork and reading. I consider the term itself to be a barrier to participation. By focusing on the difficulties experienced by some students this deficit model of learning ignores the changing needs of all students. The label of 'special' implies exclusionary

categories of 'normal' and 'different', 'us' and 'them'. Promoting participation in a school therefore requires a shift in understanding in which:

"Diversity is not viewed as a problem to be overcome, but as a rich resource to support the learning of all". (ibid., p.12)

Starting Points (2): Introducing my Approach to Research

This study has not emerged from a void. It has grown out of, and is closely connected to, other research interests that I have been developing over a number of years. Chapter Four, *Autobiographical Tales*, provides some background to these. I do not think it is possible to distinguish where one 'piece' of research ends and the next one starts. Research is a never-ending process. All my professional work in schools has contributed to the ideas in this thesis. It is also impossible to ignore the impact of non-professional experiences relating to education: for example, as a child at school and later as a parent and a governor. And yet, even acknowledging these does not fully explain how this specific study connects with the whole of my life: my past, present and concerns for the future. As a human being I necessarily come with a set of values and beliefs which inform my work. My interest in, and commitment to, the issues raised here in this thesis have grown out of the life I have lived, and am living.

My researcher stance and values

"The constructs held by individuals are likely to involve a mixture of political, ethical and theoretical ideas which have been shaped by particular knowledge, values and experience and by membership of particular social groups. These then interact with research in a number

of different ways... it is important to consider how personal values and beliefs may shape the research topic, methods and outcome."

(Bines, 1995, p.43)

As Bines argues, *who* we are shapes our decisions about *what*, *how* and *why* we chose to research in the ways that we do. However, analysing and making explicit what we mean by 'who we are' is not unproblematic. I can place myself in a number of categories that tell a reader something about me: for example, I am female, white, working class (once upon a time, at least) and English. Even when put together none of these adjectives explains me fully, although what I choose to include in and omit from this list is also in itself revealing. As Thompson points out, there is a naivety in reducing a person to "*a conceptual meccano set*" (1978, p.357) and, anyway, the meanings of these categories are partly determined by *who* is interpreting them.

Perhaps it is more helpful to explain that I am passionate about education and the power it has to change people's lives, for better and for worse. I taught in secondary schools for ten years, worked briefly as an educational officer in a local education authority and then for the last ten years I have worked as a researcher on a range of different projects as well as being a tutor on courses in education. Throughout I have been committed to the principle of equality, although recently I have found the term social justice to be more appropriate (Griffiths, 1998, p.87). This change in perspective is reflected in my professional development. Twenty years ago as a teacher I was concerned with the learning difficulties experienced by individual students. Over time this focus has shifted from individual students' difficulties to the contexts of learning: first, classrooms, then schools as institutions, and now the wider role of education within society. The former highlighted individual equalities and inequalities, the latter emphasises justices and injustices at a school and

societal level. This thesis is part of that development. My commitment as a researcher is to the exploration of how and in what ways education can be a means to greater social justice.

The purposes and nature of educational research

In a seminar given by David Gillborn, on racism in education, he talked about the importance of being politically committed to his research activities. It was, he said, what allowed him *“to sleep at night”* (1999). This comment has a resonance for me. I agree with Potts when she explains that the purposes of educational research are:

“To try and make sense of what is going on now ... developing policy and practice is a second fundamental aim.” (1998a, p.16)

In this thesis I have tried to make sense of *“what is going on”* in schools so that policies and practices may be developed. This is the focus of my final research question: *To what extent can the concept of school cultures contribute to the understanding and development of participation in schools?* In this way I hope to make some contribution towards the furthering of social justice.

However, a commitment to social justice is not only about *what* you research but also about *how*: *“Reflexivity, openness, collaboration and consultation are all key features”* (Griffiths, 1998, p.109). These considerations are embedded throughout the research process which I describe in Chapter Two. Booth and Ainscow (1998) highlight the importance of integrating a researcher’s values and purposes with their research methods when they scrutinised the eight research reports that comprise their study of inclusion in education. They asked of each one:

“Are forms of presentation and research methods seen as part of the approach to inclusion and exclusion or as distinct from it?” (p.15)

They found that some of their colleagues made use of methods which marginalised the very people whom they set out to study. In this way their actions replicated the exclusion experienced by these people within the education system (*ibid.*, p.243). I have therefore aimed to be just and participatory in the methodology of this study: not only in terms of what I research but also who and how. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Two, *Methodological Considerations*.

Structuring the Thesis

Chapter Two, which follows this introductory chapter, is an analysis of the methodological considerations underpinning the research. It is perhaps more conventional, when writing a thesis, to include a chapter exploring relevant literature before examining methodologies. However, I have not conformed to this structure for two reasons. First, I wanted to explore the methodology of the whole thesis and not just the empirical work, and therefore include within Chapter Two a section on the methodology of my reading and writing. Second, I did not observe a standard research pattern of reading, then fieldwork and finally writing. I did all three simultaneously and so it would be false to present a different chronology. My reading resonated with my past and present experiences in schools and vice versa, and by regularly writing about them both, each developed and enriched my understanding of the other. The structure of the thesis therefore has emerged like a spiral over time: changing direction as new ideas have been examined, incorporated into the study and then later enlarged, reduced and/or dismissed.

Chapter Two, Finding Out: Methodological Considerations

The purpose of Chapter Two is to make explicit the actions I took to address the research questions and why. I begin by expanding on my understanding of the nature and purposes of research. I then describe in detail the three main areas of my investigation. These are:

- (i) Exploring school cultures through reading
- (ii) Exploring my own school cultures
- (iii) Exploring the cultures of Bowden School

The first of these examines the reading I undertook to develop my conceptual understandings: what I read, how and why. The second focuses on the exploration of my past experiences of schools and education. I consider the purposes of doing so and describe the processes I used to write and analyse the ensuing autobiographical tales. Finally, I consider the case study of Bowden School. I examine the theoretical justification for the approaches I used as well as provide detailed descriptions of how I set about implementing them in practice.

Chapter Three, Reading to Develop Conceptual Understandings

The purpose of Chapter Three is to consider the reading that I have undertaken as part of the study. I draw on a range of writers and in doing so question not only their conceptual understandings but also my own. The chapter is in three main sections:

- (i) Reading and understanding the concept of culture
- (ii) Reading and understanding school cultures
- (iii) Reading and understanding participation

In this way the chapter allows me to begin to address the research questions: “*What are school cultures?*” and “*What is participation?*” It also provides a

source of ideas and findings for the remainder of the thesis and has helped, therefore, to shape both the *Autobiographical Tales* and the case study of Bowden School.

Chapter Four, Including Myself: Autobiographical Tales

Chapter Four draws on my existing knowledge and experiences of schools and education. It is in four sections, each of which corresponds to a stage in my life:

- (i) Being a student at school
- (ii) Starting my career as a teacher
- (iii) Establishing myself at Hartbrook School
- (iv) Becoming a head of department at Shelbourn Village College

Through an analysis of these autobiographical fragments I build on the conceptual understandings developed through my reading and, in doing so, allow ideas to emerge which then help to shape the thematic approach to the subsequent chapters on Bowden School. In this way I begin to address the third research question: *“To what extent can the concept of school cultures contribute to the understanding and development of participation in schools?”*

Chapter Five, Introducing Bowden School

This is the first of four chapters about Bowden School. Together they allow me to develop further my understanding of the research questions. The purpose of Chapter Five is to introduce the case study: to make ‘real’ Bowden School as a tangible place in time and space and peopled with recognisable students and staff. It is in three sections:

- (i) Background to the school

- (ii) The learning support department
- (iii) Exploring the cultures of Bowden School

The first section provides some background about the school's history, locality, students and members of staff. The second focuses on the learning support department because this is the context in which I worked and in which my understandings of the school's cultures have developed. The final section introduces each of the themes that shape the following three chapters. It ends with some stories about one student from the school in which the interconnectedness of these themes are explored.

Chapter Six, Interacting with External Worlds

Chapter Six explores how the cultures of Bowden School are more or less permeated and shaped by its external worlds and the ways in which these interactions can support the participation of members of the school as well as act as barriers to their participation. The chapter is divided into two parts: external worlds that are broadly political in nature and those which are broadly personal. However, the relationships and interactions between the two is acknowledged and explored throughout the chapter. The first half is divided into two sections:

- (i) Government legislation
- (ii) Interacting with the local education community

I begin by examining the impact of national legislation, past and present, on the cultures of Bowden School. I then consider how the cultures of the school are modified by interactions with members of its local education community: other schools, both secondary and primary, and also the local education authority. The second half of the chapter examines ways in which the cultures of Bowden School shape, and are shaped by, private external worlds. It is also

in two sections, the titles of which make reference to the notion of 'ghosts' introduced in Chapter Four, *Autobiographical Tales*:

- (iii) Ghosts in the classroom: students
- (iv) Ghosts in the classroom: staff

In these sections I consider how the external worlds of families, friends, neighbourhoods and previous educational experiences, for both students and staff, may promote as well as form barriers to their participation.

Chapter Seven, Forming Relationships within the Institutional Structures of a School

The purpose of Chapter Seven is to scrutinise the cultures of Bowden School through an exploration of how relationships between its members are formed within its institutional structures. I examine policies and practices that support the development of participatory relationships as well as policies and practices that act as barriers to their formation. In doing so I discuss notions of identity and belonging, values and beliefs, as well as status, power and control. The chapter is divided into three sections:

- (i) Relationships amongst staff
- (ii) Relationships amongst students
- (iii) Relationships between staff and students.

In the first section I consider relationships between the senior management team and other staff, departmental relationships and intradepartmental relationships. In the second section I consider how far school policies and practices are able to promote participatory relationships between students by focusing on student friendships and their antithesis, bullying. In the final section I explore how relationships between staff and students are also shaped by the institutional structures of the school. I consider the school's formal

rules for students, the organisation of the pastoral system and arrangements for student councils.

Chapter Eight, Supporting Classroom Learning: Valuing Diversity?

Because of the relative autonomy of teachers in lessons, classroom activities are revealing of members' deeply held beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning. Attitudes to student diversity can also be scrutinised, including notions of success and failure, and 'normal' and 'other'. Therefore, in this final chapter on Bowden School I focus on those policies and practices which are directly concerned with supporting the formal learning of students in classrooms. In doing so I explore further the significance of the school's cultures in understanding the participation and barriers to the participation of its students in the learning process. The chapter is divided into three sections:

- (i) Structuring the timetable for classroom learning
- (ii) Approaches to classroom teaching and learning
- (iii) Providing additional classroom support

In the first section I examine the construction of Bowden School's timetable and the factors that determine its complex organisation as well as ways in which students are grouped together to learn. In the second section I explore approaches to teaching and learning at the school and suggest that they are dominated by teachers' concerns to maintain control over students' behaviour. The focus of the final section is the provision of additional support at Bowden School by members of the learning support department and the language support team.

Chapter Nine: Answering the Research Questions

In the penultimate chapter of the thesis I consider how far, and in what ways, my findings from the case study of Bowden School contribute to answering the research questions. I also refer to, and reflect back upon, my findings from the reading and the *Autobiographical Tales*, which together have informed the thesis. The chapter is in three sections, each of which relates to one of the questions as summarised in Figure 1:1. In the first two sections I redefine my understanding of the key concepts of 'school cultures' and 'participation'. In the final section I establish and discuss the six principal conclusions arising from my analysis of the research.

Chapter Ten: Closing the Thesis

In this final chapter I reflect further on the study as I bring it to a close. The chapter is in three sections:

- (i) The principal conclusions of the thesis
- (ii) A critique of the methodology
- (iii) Recommendations for further research

Together these provide an overview of the thesis including its main findings and methodological strengths and limitations as well as some suggestions for additional research to develop further the ideas and concerns raised in the study. Finally, I end by considering the wider contribution this thesis makes to understanding and developing the process of research.

CHAPTER TWO

FINDING OUT, METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

*"The biggest lie that a so-called 'methodology' tells
is of the distance between us and our work; hence
we elaborate the clinical nature, the sterile
cleanliness of the instruments we use."*

(Clough and Barton, 1995, pp. 3-4)

This chapter examines how and why I chose the methods that I did to address my research questions. The methodology concerns the whole thesis and not just the empirical work, because each stage of the research, through reading and reflecting on my experiences in schools, has informed and directed the next. It is this narrative I wish to explore here. The overall principle, which has guided my judgement about methodology, is that of the appropriateness, or integrity, of my choices, taking into account:

- (i) the substantive issues of the thesis
- (ii) my understanding of the nature of research
- (iii) ethical concerns.

Thus the methodology of the study reflects the multiplicities and inconsistencies of school cultures and the people who are a part of them, including myself. I explore the convictions, ideas, opinions and ideologies which shape and are shaped by the cultures of schools. These complex and ambiguous pressures exist at a personal, professional and political level and are local, national and global in their scope. I therefore acknowledge and emphasise *"the political and moral dimensions of social research"* (Potts, 1998a, p.20). By premising this study on such values it is possible to be criticised for

being, what Tooley and Darby call, a *"partisan researcher"*, although even they recognise that:

"An important area of satisfaction... is precisely working on issues to which one does have emotional or political commitment." (1998, p.15)

I do not consider it possible to research without that *"commitment"*. As Scott (2000) argues: *"Values... are essential dimensions to the research enterprise"* (p.132).

Clough and Barton's comment, at the beginning of the chapter, warn against the pretence of detaching the researcher from the research, or *"the knower as separate from the known"* (Heshusius, 1994, p.15). In this study I have aimed for integrity, honesty and accuracy and have set out to be alert to misunderstandings, deception and self-deception. However, as Eisner explains:

"Knowledge is always constructed relative to a framework, to a form of representation, to a cultural code, and to a personal biography... all we can know is the result of a transaction between our sentient and intelligent selves and a world we cannot know in its pristine state."

(1993, p.54-5)

My understanding of the nature of educational research is premised on the belief that it is part of a continually developing process and therefore it is very rarely complete or pure. Ary *et al* (1996) define the purpose of educational research as being to:

"Acquire dependable and useful information about the educative process... that can be used to explain, predict and control events in educational situations." (p.20)

I am uneasy with these absolutes as they *"acquire... information... to explain, predict and control"*. Schostak describes research which is presented as

"finished, perfected and available for infinite repetition" as being a *"distilled illusion"* (1998, p.1). Ambiguities and uncertainties are integral to my understanding of schools and their cultures rather than an indication that my research is flawed. I do not ignore such inconsistencies: they demand my attention by challenging my existing ideas and opening up possibilities for further explorations.

Throughout the study I have discussed with others my developing ideas as they have emerged from my reading, writing and reflections on my experiences in schools. Winter describes this as *"involving others as creative partners in one's own thinking about shared experience"* (1998, p.65). This has encouraged me to recognise the valuable skills and knowledge that others can contribute to the research process. For example, at Bowden School my LSA colleagues challenged my understanding of their role. By listening to them I found that the aspects of the job which, for example, I considered to be difficult or frustrating were viewed very differently at times by others. I had to readjust my thinking. Therefore I agree with Walker when he argues that:

"Research provides a source for exposing, even for creating, ambiguity: not out of a sense of mischief or to crystallise structural conflict, but as a contribution to the quality of life." (1991, p.106)

As I explained in the introduction to the thesis, I consider the furthering of social justice to be a primary purpose of my research work. Therefore it is essential that I endeavour to be just towards those involved in the study. This requires that I am alert to the dangers of *"deception"* and *"betrayal"* in fieldwork (Griffiths, 1998, p.39) and am aware of the relationship of power between the researcher and the researched. I have set out to be open about my research with those whom it may affect. I have tried to be honest about the purpose of this study and to inform people of their possible roles in it. I have

negotiated how my research findings might be disseminated and have promised confidentiality and anonymity to all those involved, using pseudonyms for the names of people and places throughout. This has not always been possible in the *Autobiographical Tales*, in Chapter Four. Certainly I could not be anonymous in it, nor could members of my family.

Maintaining an ethical stance is not always straightforward. From the very start, at Bowden School, I was introduced to all staff as a student-researcher who would be observing the school in the role of a learning support assistant (LSA). However, many seemed to forget the former, especially after I had been there for a few weeks. This was valuable in some ways because I was able to observe the school at work with less of a sense that people were making concessions and special efforts because of me. However, it also meant that people's behaviour was more clearly exposed to my scrutiny. For example, members of the learning support department would talk unselfconsciously amongst themselves about students and other members of staff: sometimes in a highly critical manner. I was privy to many of these conversations without being able to negotiate the status of their contents in terms of my research. I did not want to betray the trust that these exchanges represented nor did I want to ignore some of their contents. In the end I was guided by the principles of anonymity and confidentiality. I also recognised the difference between a comment made on the spur of the moment, perhaps in anger, and a considered response to an interview question. This is not to argue one is more 'true' than the other, but in reporting my findings I have provided contextual details where necessary.

I also consider it more ethically acceptable to contribute in some ways to the lives of those I research rather than just to extract a set of findings from them.

At Bowden School I gave my time as a LSA. I think I was a competent and conscientious member of staff and supported students and teachers as well as I could. Also, at an informal level my presence as a questioner in the school possibly shifted the perspectives of some individuals about their understanding of its policies and practices. My intentions, however, were to provide a more structured feedback about the school. I asked on a number of occasions to talk to the headteacher and the head of the learning support department, but neither responded to my offers. I suggested that they might like a written report to check whether my representation of the school was fair but they said they 'trusted me'. Their only concern was that I ensured the school's anonymity in published writings. My research was seen, I think, as being for my benefit and not theirs. Indeed, their unwillingness to engage formally in my research is an important finding from this case study and I discuss its significance further in Chapters Nine and Ten..

Exploring School Cultures through Reading

This section considers the methodology of my reading for the study: that is, how I chose to address my research questions through the scrutiny of written texts. I examine what I read, and also how and why. As with any aspect of research I was also able to build on past experiences.

Reading to satisfy researcher insecurities

"For a long time I was continually putting off the next step in my exploration because I felt I ought to know more, knew there were books written about these things, felt I must read them all before I could go any further."

(1934, p.33)

The psychoanalyst Marion Milner made this comment in her journal as she struggled to make professional sense of how individuals lived their lives. It highlights a paradox about the role of reading as part of research. Throughout the thesis, reading has challenged my existing understandings and stimulated new ideas. However, it has at times almost paralysed me into believing that I have to read yet another book or article: that there is always more to find out and that others already know it. I have tried to avoid this form of insecurity by integrating the activities of reading, visiting schools and writing rather than seeing these as three separate stages of my inquiry.

Winter draws attention to another possible relationship between reading and researcher insecurities: that of proving to *others* that one does know enough.

"I mean using quotations from prestigious publications as a way of 'propping up' one's work, making it seem 'academically respectable', treating the library as a source of usable commodities which add to the market value of one's writing." (1998, p. 66)

Winter is not suggesting that a researcher should not read: in the article referred to he draws on others' writings. Rather, he is highlighting the importance of *"using data from one's own inquiry as a starting point for questioning, for challenging, for seeking interpretations"* (op cit., p. 67). Reading should support, extend and contest one's understandings rather than constrain them. In this study I have drawn on the ideas generated through writing my autobiographical tales and working at Bowden School to help direct my reading as well as vice versa.

Reading to address the research questions

The purpose of my reading has been to help address the research questions. The three main areas of reading, in which I have engaged, are:

- (i) The concepts of culture and school cultures: research question, *What are school cultures?*
- (ii) Participation and barriers to participation: research question, *What is participation?*
- (iii) Methodological issues: that is, *How should I address the research questions?*

Although I have focused my choice of reading around the exploration of three main areas, much of it has resonated across them all. For example, Booth and Ainscow's (1998) international study of inclusion in education examines different perspectives of the concepts of inclusion and exclusion and their relationship to participation and barriers to participation. However, it has also been valuable in developing my understanding of school cultures and in particular the impact of national contexts. In addition, the book is structured around eight case studies, each using a range of methodological approaches. Reflecting on these has informed my understanding of the research process.

Reading about culture and school cultures: A driving force behind this study was my dissatisfaction with the presentation of the concept of school cultures in education texts. The terms 'school ethos', 'climate', 'atmosphere' as well as 'culture' could all be found in the literature but often with little clarity about what they represented and how they differed from one another. I started my reading, therefore, with a literature search of these terms. By using electronic search systems I came up with literally hundreds of references but was disappointed with these findings. There were two particular emphases: first, the impact of culture on schools as organisational structures, for example as part of the 'school improvement movement' (e.g. Louis and Smith, 1991) or in terms of resisting or sustaining 'school change' (e.g. Fullan, 1999)

and second, the notion of sub-cultures, for example, staff culture (e.g. Hargreaves, 1992) and student culture (e.g. Woods, 1990). Whilst many of these ideas were interesting they did not satisfy my understanding of school cultures as multi-layered and complex.

I decided to put education temporarily to one side and focus on the concept of culture. This was a rewarding time as I delved into anthropology and philosophy and established themes that later became integral to the study. For example, Williams (1977) and Thompson (1978) reinforced for me the historicity of cultures, an idea which is important to the development of Chapter Two, *Autobiographical Tales*. Through reading Pearson (1974), Douglas (1973) and Thompson (again) I reflected on the role of rules, mores and taboos in cultures. These ideas later emerged in Chapter Seven, *Forming Relationships within a School*.

When I returned to the education section in the library I read around these related concepts rather than texts that focused specifically on school culture, ethos or whatever. As I did so, I also began to reflect on the relationship between school cultures and participation. The study of multi-ethnic schools by Blair and Bourne (1998), for example, highlighted the relationships between students' participation and the values held by teachers. I also read ethnographic studies of schools. I returned to old favourites (e.g. Lacey, 1976 and Ball, 1981) and, for me, new studies (e.g. Stanley, 1989 and Thomas *et al*, 1998). Although these books do not set out to examine school cultures directly they provided an insight into the complexity of individual schools.

I turned to fictional accounts of school life as well. I re-read Dickens's *Hard Times* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. One of my supervisors lent me Carr's *The*

Harpole Report (1982) and I came across Blishen's (1955) semi-fictional account of his experiences as a new teacher in *The Roaring Boys*. These were all thought provoking in different ways: their strength being that they focus on the human, and the sometimes in-humane, relationships that make up the cultures of a school. Finally, there has been a growing interest in the theoretical study of school cultures. As new texts have found their way into the library I have endeavoured to read them: for example, Bruner (1996), Prosser (1999), Finnan and Levin (2000) and Alexander (2000). This increase in the use of the term school culture is also reflected in government publications (for example, DfEE, 1999).

Reading about participation: Exploring the concept of participation through reading was more straightforward in some ways than that of school cultures because my professional interests have been firmly rooted in associated areas. However, although I had already read widely, I did not want to become stale or complacent. There were three main ways in which I challenged and developed my conceptual understanding. I read texts which were: first, outside of education; second, within education but outside of UK contexts; third, new publications.

I began by reading texts outside of education because I had learnt, from my experience of exploring the concept of culture, how helpful it was to consider my thesis through a different lens. Also, reading around culture had already provided me with a broader idea of what participation might mean. I had come across a number of books which I thought would be worth pursuing. Sibley (1995) in particular, helped me to explore the theme of being inside and outside of cultures, both literally and metaphorically, through his exploration

of how people are excluded, and exclude themselves, from aspects of western societies.

Once again, fiction provided me with accounts of individuals' experiences of being included and excluded from their cultures. For example, *Feasting, Fasting* (Desai, 1999) explores the alienation of a brother and his sister from the homes in which they live. The young man leaves India to study at an American university. He lodges with a family whose unhappy lives are a source of wonder and distress for him. Meanwhile his sister remains in the family home in India. However, she seems as dislocated from this environment as her brother does from his. At the end of the novel it is difficult to think where either of them would have a sense of belonging and participation

By reading about participation outside of UK contexts, I was able to explore a wider range of understandings of this concept and so challenge my own. Two events particularly made the value of doing this clear to me. First, I attended the *Including the Excluded* International Congress held at Manchester University in July 2000. This not only provided me with papers to read but also the opportunity to talk to people about ideas and concerns contained within them. Doing so provided a sharp reminder of different countries' priorities in terms of encouraging greater student participation: for example, the impact of the HIV virus and Aids on education in sub-Saharan Africa. Second, in March 2001 I was funded by UNESCO to help run a workshop in India (Booth and Black-Hawkins, 2001). Whilst there I visited schools in Mumbai and Chennai and talked to teachers and others working in education. This experience, involving colleagues from Brazil, Norway and South Africa, as well as India, gave me a clearer context in which to understand related

literature (for example, Savolainen *et al*, 2000; Alexander, 2000, Booth and Ainscow, 1998).

I kept up-to-date with new publications, by checking journals and book reviews. I also read recent government publications to be aware of legislative changes that might impact upon schools. (e.g. DfEE, 1997, 2001).

Reading about methodological issues: I began this thesis fairly confident about my understanding of methodological issues. I had been researching in schools all my professional life and, as a tutor in education, had helped students set up school-based inquiries and advised them on the pitfalls and pleasures of research methodologies. However, my assumptions were challenged in two ways, and fairly early on. First, with the encouragement of my supervisor, I wrote an account of my experiences of schools as a child through to the present day. The purpose of this exercise was to explore what I already knew about school cultures and participation and barriers to participation. However, as it grew we discussed how this account might form a chapter of the study. Because I had some concerns about its place in a doctoral thesis I read about the role of autobiographies and life histories in research (for example, Atkinson *et al*, 1997; Cortazzi, 1993; Erben, 1998) as well as other people's autobiographies (for example, Milner, 1934 and Spence, 1986).

Second, and connected to the autobiographical chapter, my supervisor asked me to write about the values that inform my work as a researcher. This again challenged my preconceptions about the research process and in two particular ways. One, it made me reassess and acknowledge the impact of my values on my research. Second, it encouraged me to think more coherently

about what I meant by truth, knowledge and understanding. An important way of clarifying these issues was through reading. A book by Griffiths (1998) became a key text. This shaped my thinking about the relationship between research and social justice. Until then I had gone about my inquiries in a careful and sensitive manner, I think, but I had not made explicit even to myself how far *“education itself is a moral activity”* (Scott, 2000, p.142).

I also read about other methodological issues throughout this study, usually in relationship to the aspect of the study on which I was working. Therefore when I joined Bowden School I read around issues of observation and later interviews. Sanger (1996) and Eisner (1991) were important here, not least because they helped me finally to reject neutrality as a feasible aim in social research and to value instead the development of greater understanding. I also read about other people’s experiences of being a participant observer in schools (e.g. Lacey, 1976; Stanley, 1989; Wong, 1995).

Finally, a thread that ran through much of my reading was the role of narrative in research. I did not set out to read about this methodological issue. However, it emerged gradually and became a central consideration in terms of how I interviewed people and wrote up my observations from Bowden School. Indeed, I had applied this approach, almost without realising, to myself when I wrote my autobiographical account. I then followed up this emergent idea with some focused reading (e.g. Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Goodson and Walker, 1991; MacLure, 1996; Jalonga *et al*, 1995).

The relationship between reading and writing

I can not easily separate the activities of reading and writing as I wrote notes about nearly everything I read for the study. Whenever I read a text I made two sets of comments. One was, as far as it is ever possible to do so, a non-critical account of the text with direct quotations. The other was a critique. I wrote these at the same time but used a different typeface so that when I returned to my notes I could distinguish between the writer's ideas and mine. This commentary took various forms: criticism about how and why I did not agree with a writer, or how and why I really enthused about an aspect of their work, plus how one piece of writing resonated with other texts I had read and/or my experiences in schools.

This is a comment I wrote about Marion Milner's journal:

"I have suddenly realised that my journals at Bowden are a form of autobiographical writing. They are different from the autobiography chapter but they are also a continuation of it. Different because they are:

- The present reconstructed rather than the past.*
- More detailed.*
- More specific focus – in one particular school, rather than my life.*
- Less about me, ostensibly at least. Really?*

I now have three types of autobiography:

- My autobiographical chapter - the past.*
- My research journals - now.*
- My daily diary from Bowden – now."*

These notes illustrate the relationship between reading and writing. I think on paper. This is an important part of the research process for me. Until I started to put down the ideas above I had not really made the, perhaps obvious, connection between writing my *Autobiographical Tales* and the journals I was

keeping at Bowden School. If I had read the Milner book but not written these sort of notes I would have lost this fleeting idea.

Exploring My Own School Cultures

"What then is an autobiography? One might say 'the story of a life as told by the person whose life it is.' A little reflection shows that this common-sense definition is simplistic. For a start one has to acknowledge that there are many stories that one could tell about one's life. Which one reveals the 'real me'? Postmodernists would answer 'None - there is no 'real me'. I would answer 'All - each reveals an aspect of what I am'." (Harré, 1998, p.135)

As Harré argues there are many autobiographies one could tell, however doing so:

"Presents us with the challenge that is at the heart of educational experience: making sense of our lives in the world." (Grumet, 1990a, p.324)

In this section I consider the role of autobiography in research, explain why I chose this approach as a means to address my research questions and describe the process that I undertook to write Chapter Four, *Autobiographical Tales*.

The role of autobiography in research

According to Delamont there is little justification for researchers to include what she calls "autobiographical / confessional writing". Even her pairing of these words is damning. With her tongue firmly in her cheek she offers one possible advantage.

"Reading such accounts [by other researchers] is a good way to cheer oneself up when feeling particularly incompetent." (1992, p.174)

However, Delamont has missed the point. Autobiographical writing provides opportunities to be open and reflexive. I have chosen to include such an account as the first case study of the thesis because doing so is methodologically consistent with my understanding of the nature and purposes of research.

I have set out to be open to others about what I bring to the thesis. Autobiographical writing provides a research context (Roberts, 1998). I do not write, think and struggle with my research in a cultural vacuum (Ely *et al*, 1997). My understanding of schools is based on the accumulated experiences I have of them. Therefore Chapter Four extends the analysis of my values and beliefs about the educative process, begun in the first two chapters of the thesis, thus allowing a reader the opportunity to challenge further my assumptions about schools and education.

I have also tried to be open with myself: to use the construction of these autobiographical accounts as a means by which I am able to challenge myself. Throughout the thesis I examine others people's beliefs and values as a way of developing my understanding of the concept of school cultures and therefore it is important to scrutinise my own. Cortazzi argues that the writing of autobiography helps us to become more aware of our own *"belief systems"* (1993, p.8) but only if subjected to the *"kind of self-scrutiny and self-disclosure demanded of any trustworthy qualitative writing"* (Ely *et al*, 1997, p.331). Such writing is challenging, demanding and sometimes painful. It is not an easy alternative to 'real' research. As Barbour points out:

"[Autobiography] raises many issues... including such problems as the nature of truthfulness, the dangers of self-deception, the validity of

certain fictions and figures of self-representation, and other ambiguities involved in knowing, depicting and assessing the self.” (1992, p.1)

The construction of autobiography demands reflexivity of the writer. The process can be seen as an interview with the self yet, unlike other interviews, the researcher is able to return to the interviewee at any time to ask for clarification and further details. In writing Chapter Four I was able to draft and re-draft, edit and change. Stories emerged over time and in response to a variety of stimuli, such as visiting schools, reading books and discussions with my supervisor. Listening to old school friends, ex-colleagues and members of my family provided me with alternative, and occasionally strikingly different, versions of my stories that caused me to think further about what to include and why. I also made use of documentary evidence: old school reports, teaching notes and photographs.

Memory is not reliable, it is flawed and reconstructed in the present (Usher, 1998). Also, as Delamont (1992) points out, there is the dangerous attraction of representing oneself either as hero or tragic victim: of not portraying oneself in a bad light. However, such criticisms are not specific to autobiography. These difficulties face all researchers when they set out to interview anyone, and not only themselves. Searching for a single ‘true’ account of any person’s life is a chimera. As Usher notes:

“ We just need to get used to living with fragmentation, and rather than endlessly searching for it, accept that the self is in process, continually re-newed and re-invented.” (1998, p.27)

Not only did I consult people who knew my past, I also received feedback from my professional colleagues. At an international conference I presented a paper which discussed forms of selection within the English education system

(Black-Hawkins, 2000). It began with an extract from Chapter Four, *Autobiographical Tales*: an account of my experiences as a student at secondary school. I was apprehensive about telling this private story to a room full of mainly strangers. I felt personally exposed and was concerned about accusations of self-indulgence. However, I was pleased with the responses I received. A number of people spoke to me afterwards, not to comment on the 'specialness' of my story, but to explain how it resonated with their own experiences, despite differences in national contexts. It seems that telling my unique, but recognisable tale, provided an opportunity for others to reflect on (re-tell) their own stories. This is what Clifford describes as "*ethnographic allegory*": a story that has elements which are both "*unique*" to the teller and "*common*" to the hearers (1986b, p.99).

I am not sure how qualitative research can be entirely non-autobiographical, anyway. As researchers we are inescapably present whatever, or whoever, is the focus of our scrutiny. Goodson and Walker point out that their own biographies have been a part of all their writings on education: it is just that they had not always recognised this.

"We have come to realise that... the value of our lives as lived is an integral part of the way we view our work, of the focus of that work, of the methodologies and perspectives chosen and deployed." (1991, p.3)

In the same way I am necessarily in all of the chapters which make up my thesis, and not only Chapter Four.

Choosing autobiography to address the research questions

The process of constructing an autobiographical account fits my conceptualisation of the research process as "*trying to make sense of what is going on*" (Potts, 1998a; also see Chapter One). Doing so has allowed me to

develop my thinking about school cultures and participation in education by reflecting on my existing experiences and understanding: as a child, secondary school student, teacher and researcher. These experiences are both personal and social, and autobiography allows the relationship between the two to be explored. To understand either it is necessary to consider both (Erben, 1998).

By examining my life over some forty years I am able to offer stories about education from the past to help to understand the present as well as consider the future (MacLure, 1996). Thompson (1978) argues that the historicity of shared cultural traditions gives meaning to actions and events in the present, as well as limiting and shaping the future. My autobiography therefore provides an historical context for the study: a means by which to consider school cultures and their relationship with participation over time. There would be little opportunity to sustain this length of research unless it was done retrospectively. The case study has therefore allowed me to examine the complexity of one individual's "*lived experiences*" (*ibid.*, p.366) in depth, over time and space.

Writing an autobiographical case study

Chapter Four started as a discussion document to draw out my existing understandings of school cultures and participation in schools: what I did and did not know. From these original notes I began to see its potential to be a more sustained study. I constructed a chronological narrative set around a number of "*critical events*" (Woods, 1993), such as being appointed as head of department, and moments of "*epiphany*" (Denzin, 1989), such as coming to understand the inherent racism in grouping students according to notions of attainment.

The criteria for choosing the focus of each account were fairly open. I wrote stories which were particularly illustrative of school cultures: for example, differences in teachers' attitudes between the primary school I attended as a child and the girls' grammar I went to at the age of eleven. I also drew on experiences that related to my own or others' participation in the life of a school: for example, the effects on the self-esteem of those students who were withdrawn from lessons to attend 'remedial' classes. I also wrote stories of any school-related memories that I could recall especially vividly, even if at the time of recollection they did not necessarily seem relevant. Finally, I added new tales and expanded existing ones as my understanding of the substantive issues of the study developed. At the same time I was wary of highlighting the more dramatic aspects of my experiences, when I knew that schools were often rather humdrum places. I wanted to get beneath the surface of such everyday ordinariness to scrutinise the deeply held beliefs and values which support the cultures of a school. My first draft was cautious. I was still concerned that this might not be 'real' research, that writing about myself was indulgent. I was also anxious about revealing my private self. My memories were vivid but my writing was not. By being tentative I had managed to *exclude* myself from the bland account I produced. I had to decide whether to take a risk both academically and personally.

I wrote a second draft, despite these concerns, because I was beginning to see the potential for a more sustained study. My first attempt had already helped to develop my research questions and direct my reading. I redrafted the stories by focusing on these emerging ideas and themes. For example, I was increasingly aware of the impact of government legislation on the cultures of a school as well as the realities of how the class system shapes teachers'

attitudes towards students. These two developments in my understanding sharpened the telling of my stories. Like the first draft, this version was arranged chronologically as a narrative, however this was not how it was written. By ranging across my experiences in a more thematic way other memories also came to the surface. This second draft was fuller, more vital and, at times, more painful to write. As I accepted the value of what I was doing I found I could recollect episodes from my past more easily. It was as if I was tapping into a resource which until then had been partially hidden from me. In writing her journals Milner describes similar experiences:

"It seemed that I was normally only aware of the ripples on the surface of my mind, but the act of writing a thought was a plunge which at once took me into a different element where the past was intensely alive."

(1934, p.59)

I was surprised at my ability to recall former emotions. My educational experiences became vivid through the pleasure, anger, hate or sadness they engendered. Inevitably I learnt some things about myself, beyond the topic of my thesis. The final account also differs from the second draft because it is more restrained. I needed to protect others and I wanted to protect myself. For ethical reasons some tales have been either edited or omitted. Where possible I have given people pseudonyms. However, I have not given anyone the opportunity to provide alternative views. These stories remain fragments from one account of my version of my experiences (Usher, 1998, p.20).

Throughout the construction of this autobiographical case study both writing and interpretation took place continuously rather than as two separate phases. Similarly, the emerging findings influenced my choice of reading whilst the texts I read shaped and reshaped my understandings. The final version, given in Chapter Four, is an integral part of the thesis rather than an

independent account. I have selected those stories, and emphasised in their telling, the concepts and themes which I explore further in the case study of Bowden School. MacLure describes the complex process of constructing a personal narrative as follows:

"What looks like a sequential matter – I did this, then I did that – involves making links backwards and forwards over a story which is, moreover, still in the telling. They involve a kind of retrospective search for the prospective significance of events and decisions, in which the seemingly innocent temporal relationships between past, present and future is confounded and displaced." (1996, p.280)

This *"retrospective search"* of my educational experiences, has been an essential stage in the development of the methodology of the study. First, writing my autobiography has made me aware of the value of listening to and retelling others' stories. Therefore in the interviews at Bowden School I endeavoured to have a more holistic approach to people's lives: asking about their experiences beyond the immediate world of the school and from their past as well as their present. Second, this sense of the impact of the past on the present and future, not only for individuals but also in relationship to a school's cultures led me to find out about the history of Bowden School. I did this through interviews and also by visiting the city library and searching its local history archives. Third, as the subject of my autobiographical writings I began to examine the role of being an insider-outsider both in terms of being inside and outside of the cultures of the different schools I explored, as well as methodologically. This contributed to my decision to participate in the cultures of a school as both an insider in the role of an LSA, and as an outsider in the role of a researcher.

Exploring the Cultures of Bowden School

I set out to develop my understanding of school cultures and the processes that support the participation of students and staff in a school by investigating one school in depth. To do so I wanted to become part of the school and so experience being included and excluded from different aspects of its life as any other member might be. I considered teaching but realised that doing so would offer few opportunities to observe the classroom practices of other staff, as well as limit the number of students with whom I would have contact.

I decided to work as an LSA on a voluntary basis. I knew I would feel comfortable in the learning support department of a comprehensive school, as this would match my experience of nine years of teaching. Also as an LSA I would have ready access to classrooms and be involved in a wide variety of curriculum areas. Finally, I welcomed the opportunity to experience, for the first time, working in a school from the perspective of a member of the non-teaching staff. I chose to work in the summer and autumn terms so that I could observe and participate in routines and rituals at the ending and beginning of a school year as well as work with the same students as they changed year groups. I decided to work for two days a week to give myself time to write up and reflect on my findings and also to support my emerging ideas with structured reading.

Using a case study approach to explore school cultures

Hammersley suggests that the term 'case study' generally *"implies the study of a small number of instances, perhaps even just one"* (1999, p.1). The emphasis is on the detailed understanding of each case. However, beyond this, a case study can be approached in a wide variety of ways. Examples of the range of

possible foci include: Lacey's (1970) exploration of a school; King's (1979) study of a single class of students in a primary school; Riddell's (1992) investigation of two groups of female students; Wolcott's (1973) study of an individual headteacher. The *Autobiographical Tales* of Chapter Four of this thesis are also a case study: a retrospective investigation of the educational experiences of one person. Case studies may also form part of larger-scale research, for example, in Blair and Bourne's (1998) report on multi-ethnic schools twenty-one schools were surveyed but with a focus on five as more detailed case studies.

In the examples provided here, a range of approaches and intentions can be identified. In some, the researchers begin with a clearly defined set of research questions. Riddell's starting point was an exploration of the factors which influence female students' choice of GCSE subjects. Others, like King, began with a more open stance. He reports that:

"I was not able to give [the headteacher] any clear idea of what I was trying to do because I did not know exactly myself." (op cit., p.4)

However, these studies all share one important element which is central to this thesis. They use a case study approach *"as a means of understanding complex human situations and human encounters"* (Simons, 1996, p.226). This is fundamental to the exploration of school cultures and their relationship to participation and barriers to participation.

Simons draws parallels between a case study approach to educational research and an appreciation of creative art, such as painting and poetry. Both, she argues, *"challenge existing forms of knowing, through using different ways of seeing"* (op cit., p.237). She refers to May's (1994) description of a painting by Cezanne of a tree. In this he reflects on how, through his personal response to this particular representation of a specific tree, he is also able to

understand something fundamental about 'the Tree'. Similarly, Simons argues, a case study allows a personal response to one school which can then be distilled into a greater knowledge of 'the School'. That is, whilst each person's study of a school (or a painting of a tree) will be unique, a fuller understanding of all schools (or trees) can be reached by examining a range of responses to differing schools.

In his book on the nature of photography Barthes (1982) argues for a close and personal examination of individual photographs rather than studying them as part of the genre of photography. He draws on his response to pictures of his recently dead mother. As a reader I could not share his unique feelings towards her although I was able to understand something about their relationship. However, more importantly it illuminated, made me see differently, my relationships with my mother as her child and with my children as their mother. Sanger draws on Barthes' work to explore the methodology of observation in social sciences research. He points out that an 'observer' of a photograph (or a school) is:

"Liberated to make novel responses to the 'text' of the image knowing full well that others may see it differently but that a richer discourse is developed from this heterogeneity of responses." (1996, p.127-8)

In this way a case study approach concurs with my understanding of the nature and purposes of educational research. It allows the opportunity, not only to seek answers but also to raise questions, develop understandings, challenge existing ideas. Or, as Simons expresses it in relationship to another painter, the surrealist Magritte:

"Research has the power to stimulate thinking as much as to express conclusions and, crucially that research, like Magritte's paintings, if portrayed in problematic ways can provoke us to think differently."
(op cit., p.232)

Using a case study approach to explore Bowden School's cultures

A case study approach allowed me, through interviews and observations, to explore in depth the experiences of members of Bowden School and so reflect on the different ways they shape and are shaped by its cultures. I was also able to draw on the understandings of a wide range of members. I deliberately wanted to include, and therefore to value, those who are often placed at the margins of research (Rudduck, 1993). From earlier work I was aware that not only teachers but also non-teaching staff, parents/carers and students can provide a rich source of knowledge about a school (Booth *et al*, 2000). In particular I wanted to examine ambiguities and inconsistencies in perspectives within and between these different groups.

Taking a case study approach to Bowden School also allowed me to explore the complexity of a person's "*lived experiences*" (Thompson, 1978). Members of a school enact many roles. Their identification with, and alienation from, cultural groups may be complicated, messy and ambiguous (Ball, 1991). I took this into account when studying the cultures of Bowden School by deliberately spending much time observing and talking with members of the school, and in a variety of situations, so as to understand better the congruence and dissonance between different aspects of their lives. For example, Carol Marina and I worked together as LSAs. We talked to each other informally on many occasions, I interviewed her and was a guest in her home. I make reference to her throughout the chapters on Bowden School as a member of staff, a parent of a student in the school and a long-standing member of the local community. I explore aspects of her past and present as well as her concerns for the future.

At the same time, exploring the cultures of Bowden School inevitably led me to consider how its members identify themselves and are identified by others, based on distinctions such as gender, ethnicity, status and so forth. A case study approach, however, supported my intentions to focus on people, not categories. Scott criticises research that uses large-scale surveys to reduce the lives of people to a set of classifications.

"Identity... is not fixed in this way. It is a conjunction of dispositions, experiences, social constructions and so forth; and how someone understands themselves cannot be determined by a conceptual schema, however sophisticated". (2000, p.2)

Doing so is comparable to the organisational structures of a school which are based upon pigeonholing and labelling its members. Students, for example, may be sorted in minds and in classrooms, into groups based on age, attainment, language or perceived behaviour. Such categorisation of people, which ignores the multiplicity of their lives, is a barrier to their participation and I have attempted through my methodology to resist this.

In the interviews I conducted, I encouraged members of the school to tell me stories about Bowden School rather than focus on abstract concepts (Schatz, 1993). In this way I hoped to pay attention to and value the meanings of their personal experiences (Cortazzi, 1993). Through the process of narrative, members were able to reveal the richness and ambiguities of their experiences across time, past, present and future and place, within and beyond the school gates. For as Clandinin and Connelly note:

"Schools are exceedingly complex places with multiple layers of meaning that depend on individuals' stories and how individuals are positioned on that landscape as well as the landscape's own narrative history of shifting values, beliefs and stories." (1996, p.30)

On being an insider-outsider in research

The concept of *insider-outsider* is strongly connected to participation and barriers to participation in schools and how these may determine in what ways members of a school are cultural insiders and outsiders. Inside suggests 'us', 'self', 'same', whilst outside implies 'them', 'other', 'different'. These are not fixed positions since the boundaries of different cultures will shift, overlap and be more or less permeable (Sibley, 1995). It is also possible to be neither fully an insider nor an outsider but to be situated in a kind of cultural 'no man's land' (Bhabha, 1994).

In the case study of Bowden School I deliberately set out to participate in its cultures by joining the staff. I wanted to reduce the gap in the research positions between what Shotter refers to as "*us' and 'them'*" (1993, p.48). As an LSA not only did I work in classrooms but I also attended staff meetings, ate in the canteen, participated in professional development days, watched sports day and enjoyed the staff Christmas celebrations. I was able to explore the world beyond the school gates as well: I was invited to colleagues' homes, visited local pubs and bumped into staff, students and parents/carers when buying groceries in the local supermarket. By working as an LSA I was able to reduce the literal and metaphorical distances between myself and others in the school. Sibley explains this as "*getting close to people, listening to them, making way for them'*" (1995, p.184).

I also experienced at first-hand the complexity and messiness of positioning myself, and being positioned by others, both inside and outside of the school's multiple and overlapping cultures. I found I had fluctuating identities and associated loyalties. For example, as a member of the learning support department I identified with my LSA colleagues yet I also associated myself

with the head of the department because this was a position I had held in the past. Members of the school also identified me in different and changing ways. The clearest distinction was between being considered as a LSA and also a researcher. These experiences provided further opportunities to reflect on what it means to belong and not belong; to participate and to be prevented from participating.

Whilst these processes offered interesting insights into my research, they also provided me with methodological concerns. Shotter's dualism of 'us' and 'them' became fuzzy. It may be that some aspects of school life are easier to detect if one is an outsider looking in: for example, how strangers are made to feel welcome. The longer I worked at Bowden School, the more I felt a part of it. My knowledge of the school inevitably developed over time and it has not always been easy for me to ascertain whether these changing perceptions were based on my greater understanding or because I gradually got used to, became (over) familiar with, aspects of the school. As the weeks went by I began to experience that I *was* an LSA with interests, concerns and irritations about the job that I shared with colleagues. I have observed my changing attitudes with some curiosity. For example, when I first started at the school I wrote about staff in the third person, that is with a degree of detachment. However, this gradually shifted and I began to refer to staff as 'we' and 'us' in my writing. Now as I complete this thesis these colleagues have returned to 'they' and 'them'.

As an *insider* researcher I had easy access to existing knowledge, held by a wider range of its members. As a member of staff, listening to people talking, finding out their interests and concerns and asking questions were all straightforward activities. My place in any classroom was accepted by students

and staff alike, as was my presence in the staffroom, canteen, offices and other meetings generally. I was able to collect copies of school and departmental documents and many were given to me as a matter of course because of my role as an LSA.

Having worked at the school also benefited my interviews. These took place shortly after I had finished as an LSA. At that point my role as *insider-outsider* became ambivalent. This allowed the interviewees to be more open and considered in their answers. They accepted me as a colleague: I could be trusted to empathise with their experiences. At the same time I could also be expected to maintain confidentiality because I was no longer a member of the school. Hence my transcripts are peppered with comments addressed directly to me, such as: *"As you know, yourself"*, *"You've been in her lesson, haven't you?"*, *"You know what he's like"*.

However, working as an insider researcher did not provide me with the straightforward access to *all* members of the school, as I had hoped. I had been particularly keen to explore the understandings and perceptions of students and parents/carers. Of the two, access to students proved far easier but still not completely satisfactory. Throughout my time in the school I chatted to students: in classrooms, playgrounds, canteens. However, the students I knew best were predominately those whom I supported in their learning. This restricted me to those who were less academically successful. Therefore, to counter this I spent a whole day as an LSA with a year seven mixed attainment class, observing them across lessons and talking to them about their work. I also conducted group interviews with students in year eight and the sixth form.

More difficult to arrange, however, were interviews with parents/carers. This could only be done with the permission of the school. I raised the issue tentatively with the head of the learning support department, but he seemed reluctant to be involved. This illustrates an ambiguity in my research role as an *insider-outsider*. It would not be typical for an LSA to make independent arrangements to interview parents/carers. I could not pursue this unless I stepped 'out of character'. I thought it would be detrimental to do so. As a compromise I formally interviewed two LSAs who had children in the school and also talked more informally to other staff who were also parents. I had similar difficulties in terms of gaining access to members of the local community. Again I relied on staff who lived locally. This included the headteacher, three LSAs and one teacher who had lived all her life in and around Bowden as well as teaching at the school for twenty-six years.

I also have some ethical concerns about the 'closeness' of this case study. That is, although all staff were informed about my status as a researcher they often seemed to forget why I was there. I did not set out to deceive. Sanger criticises the notion of "*covert research*" but also notes that there are times when every one knows who you are but your role as researcher becomes hidden, like "*being a chameleon*." (1996, p.35). As professional friendships developed, some people would chat to me in a very frank manner about their work, other staff and students. Such confidences were often rich findings. Yet I was not comfortable about using them as they implied a level of trust which I was loath to breach. It did not even seem appropriate to request permission to do so: the act of asking would, I think, have been damaging.

However, despite these concerns, I agree with Walker when he writes:

"I have worked with being distant and it has been easier to keep the process of research pure... The quality of data is different when research

keeps distant; it is easier to handle, less deeply subjective, easier to manipulate and to categorise, and on the whole less revealing, less real, thin. Given the choice between data collected from strangers during intensive, but brief periods of fieldwork; and that which comes from close contact over long periods of time in cross-cutting relationships, I find I prefer to work with the latter, despite the difficulties, technical and professional, because they seem to offer promise of insight and understanding." (1991, p.99)

Starting the case study

In March 1998 I made my initial contact with Bowden School. I telephoned the headteacher, David Roberts, to explain my research intentions. I then arranged to go to the school to talk to Philip Cleary, the head of the learning support department. This first visit took place in April 1998. I met the staff in the department, had a tour of the school site and ate lunch in the school canteen. Philip Cleary gave me copies of school and departmental documents and talked about the school, its staff and students. We discussed how to organise my time at the school. I wanted to attend staff meetings so we decided on Mondays and Wednesdays in the first term to allow me access to staff briefing and departmental meetings and Mondays and Thursdays in the second term for briefing and house meetings. Philip also offered to construct my timetables so that over the two terms I would work with a range of teachers, students and subject areas. By the end of my time at the school I had worked alongside twenty-one teachers and supported students from all year groups except the sixth form. I also worked within every curriculum area except physical education.

We agreed that I should fulfil the same duties and responsibilities as any other LSA and in return I would be included in all the areas of school life to which

any LSA would have access. In addition to the timetabled commitments I contributed to other departmental responsibilities: helping with the lunchtime homework club, preparing materials for lessons, administering reading tests, providing information on students to staff, and making the department's teas and coffees on certain mornings. As well as attending various staff meetings I also took part in two whole school professional development days. At the end of the summer term I assisted with the year six students' primary days and in the autumn term I attended some of the induction course for new members of staff. Like all members of the department I covered for absent colleagues.

The learning support department arranged regular social events to which I was always invited, such as lunchtime visits to the pub to celebrate birthdays and the end of half terms and terms. I was invited to colleagues' homes and I stayed the night at one after the department's Christmas trip to a local hotel for dinner and a disco. I worked hard to 'fit in' and members of the department were generous in their efforts to assimilate me. I thoroughly enjoyed the months I spent at Bowden School. It would be difficult to over-emphasise this. The pleasure I experienced particularly from working with staff and students within the learning support department, was immense and perhaps even surprised me. This has undoubtedly influenced my understanding of the school's cultures and the processes of inclusion and exclusion operating in and on it.

Observations and journal writing

I kept a hand written journal of what I did and saw. This included a chronological record of every:

- beginning (bg) and end (en) of the school day
- break (bk) and lunchtime (lt)

- lesson in which I was supporting the subject teacher
- lesson in which I taught small groups of students by myself
- meetings I attended: staff briefing (bmt), house (hmt) and departmental (dmt).

To keep track of these journal entries I referenced each one with its date and a code based on one of the categories above. For example, (**ref: 3/6/dmt**) refers to a departmental meeting I attended on the 3rd June; (**ref: 3/6/1**) refers to lesson one on the same day. As I kept these records of each part of every day I was aware that the ordinary daily, weekly, termly and yearly routines of a school often seem mundane. However, I was mindful of the limitations of producing a 'soap opera' version in which only dramatic events are documented. It is through the customary and accepted practices of schools that cultures are revealed as well as through more overtly dramatic events.

Stage one: handwritten notes In lessons I made notes on factual details such as the number of students in the group, the topic being taught, materials used, teaching approaches and styles and layout of the room. I also wrote a commentary on what was happening, trying to find patterns and inconsistencies. Sometimes I took notes as events took place, including brief direct quotations from staff and student, and sometimes I had to rely on my short term memory and find other times during the day to scribble down my observations. Although the reason I was at the school was to conduct my research, staff quite rightly expected that providing support for students in their lessons was my priority. Therefore it was not always possible to write up a lesson fully whilst it took place.

Stage two: a typed version of the journal I typed up my notes each evening, at school or at home. Occasionally, I left this task to the following day, which was never as successful. I was surprised how quickly I forgot the details of

individual lessons and other events. I always wrote in full sentences and paragraphs so that each part of the school day became a narrative. I found doing so helped me to recall the day more vividly. Grumet argues that research narratives allow “*specificity, presence and power*” (1990b, p.281). I aimed for these qualities in my writing so that anyone reading these stories, including myself at a later date, would be able to engage with their content. This format also clarified the task of choosing extracts from the journals to incorporate in the thesis. I did not attempt to keep my ‘findings’ separate from my analysis. This seems to me to be an impossible and unnecessary task. As I typed up my notes I simultaneously added commentaries using a different typeface: ideas, connections, themes, uncertainties and ambiguities, in relationship to my research questions. I particularly highlighted incidences in which the participation of members of the school was encouraged or reduced. . As Ely *et al* (1997) argue:

“The minute we begin thinking about the field, the second we put pen to paper for field log entries, we are already selecting, dropping or figuring data from the far more complex real thing that we have witnessed, in order to tell a credible story.” (p.19)

I was consistent in my use of layout and key words so that later I was able to use a word processor to ‘search’ for threads. I always included the names of specific students and members of staff, curriculum subjects, types of teaching approaches and so forth. I also added key ideas to my journal. These developed in a number of ways: from my growing understanding of the school, my reading and from the on-going writing of my autobiographical tales. Each entry ended with a list of possible key ideas (see below, *Science Lesson: Stage Two*). Larger, more structured, themes also emerged. For example, at the end of Chapter Five I discuss how I wanted to explore the impact of school rules on relationships between staff and students. Therefore, where appropriate, I made

reference to the following terms: *rules, (overt and covert), punishment (specific punishments - 'verbal telling off', 'on report', 'extra work', 'kept in', 'exclusion'), rewards (specific rewards - 'verbal praise', 'sticker')*. Other themes were explored and then discarded, such as the notion of power. I wrote a draft chapter on how the role of power shapes and is shaped by the cultures of a school and in doing so realised that it could not be separated out from any of the other themes/chapters on the school. I continued to use my journal notes to sort and analyse my observations throughout my time at the school and incorporated my interview notes after I had left. The process was central to determining the overall structure of the thesis. The final typed version of the journal amounted to over 60,000 words.

Stage Three: Ongoing I re-read my narratives many times and noted patterns and inconsistencies within individual stories and between stories and interviews. Emerging themes in the journals resonated with themes from the my autobiographical tales and from my reading. As different ideas developed I went back and re-read earlier stories adding new key terms. For example, for the theme *Interacting with the External World* I added the following key terms: *family, ghosts, ethnicity, neighbourhood, friends, local education authority, national government*. Because I always wrote my typed versions as fully as possible, I usually needed to edit those which I chose to include in the thesis: partly to reduce their word length and partly to focus on particular issues.

The extracts below illustrate the first two stages of the writing process I used to construct stories about the school from my observations. The first is a typed version of my handwritten notes for one particular lesson. The second shows the same lesson as I typed it at the end of that day. I have also used a stage

three edited version of the story of this lesson in the thesis, Chapter Eight, *Supporting Classroom Learning: Valuing Diversity?*

Journal extract (handwritten notes, stage one): science lesson year seven

(Kelly also supporting)

Quiet and listening

Invertebrates and vertebrates

Maybe they are better first lesson in morning?

C – fists on table – bang, bang, bang.

Stops – starts – stops – starts. I ask him again. Stops – starts.

- 1. Finish key from last week*
- 2. Write definition of invertebrates and vertebrates. How? Unclear.*

Craig says fuck under breath but loud enough to be heard. I move. Playing with tie.

It is very quiet but is anyone listening? Enjoying lesson? (Is Joan's aim behaving and calm even if not learning?)

Joan asks questions – nobody replies. Nobody listening?

20 children

- 5 heads on desk*
- 3 notes to each other*
- 2 waving out of window – who to?*
- 2 poking in back and chest*

"It's a long, long piece of work today so nobody is to make any fuss".

Craig is being a complete pain. Why?

"Seemed all right, don't you think?"

Journal extract (typed notes, stage two): science lesson year seven

Once again Joan talks to them and they sit there maybe listening, maybe not. They are at least relatively quiet which might be because it is first thing in the morning. Craig sits banging his fists on the work bench. The noise gets louder and louder. I ask him to stop and he does but only

to resume a few minutes later and this time slightly louder. We repeat this twice more. Meanwhile Joan continues to talk on and on and the children get more and more fidgety or sleepy. Craig starts to mutter and I realise that he is saying "Fuck" again and again in a monotone. I decide to move somewhere else as I don't want to be responsible for him being out of school and yet I know another student is going to hear him eventually and I will have to be seen to reprimand him. If I do he will be sent to Dale Morris [deputy headteacher] and it will simply escalate. I move and decide to count the number of students in the room.

There are 20:

5 have their heads on the desks,

3 are writing notes to each other,

2 have slowly moved to the window and are waving to someone,

2 are poking one another in the back and chest under cover of the workbench

and Craig is saying "Fuck" to himself.

All of these activities seem to me to be more attractive than listening to Joan Miller talking about mammals.

So 13 of the 20 students are not fully engaged (or possibly engaged at all) in the content of the lesson. And yet there are three qualified teachers in the room. We could do such exciting group work. This frustrates me. Joan seems satisfied as the room is quiet and she appears to be blissfully unaware of the lack of attention. Or does she choose not to acknowledge it? Is her idea of a good lesson one in which she does not have to tell off anyone? Or one in which children learn and with enthusiasm? She ends her talk with the far from inspirational observation to the class: "It's a long, long piece of work today so nobody is to make any fuss."

Then she gives them a number of written tasks to complete for which the instructions are generally unclear. The tasks are not differentiated in any way to take account of the diversity of students. She lets them chat (if quiet) but does not seem to think that the students might learn from each other in any collaborative way. There is no discussion, only teacher

directed questions and nobody really takes any notice of these (see lesson 5 on 'leaves').

Craig seems particularly distressed today. I found out later from Jane Lee [LSA] that he had been excluded for a day, yesterday. This seems counterproductive:

- He appears to hate being in school (he has said that he wants to go home in several lessons in which I've been with him) so excluding him may not be a 'punishment'.
- Some of his anger and sadness are due to family difficulties so being at home may exacerbate them further.
- Jane Lee thinks he does very well in his reading workshops and he missed one yesterday because of being excluded. She thinks he should have been given an internal exclusion with work being set by the learning support centre.

Anyway, Craig does not seem interested in writing about vertebrates and invertebrates. He copies two short sentences from the text book as requested but this takes about half an hour and he refuses to do anything else. He shows me a card which he was given by DM and which allows him to leave any lesson if he feels he can not cope. He is expected then to go to DM or the learning support centre. (I wonder to myself if I can get a card like this...)

At the end of the lesson Joan says to me that she thinks it went better than usual. "Seemed all right, don't you think?" I say, "yes", not knowing what else to reply.

Key words: punishment; control; boredom; learning styles; exclusion; support for learning; relationships (staff / students); participation; ghosts.

(Ref: 10/6/1)

In an article entitled "Do you see what I see?" Reid and her three colleagues (1996) describe what happened when they all observed the same set of classroom activities. They found that what they each saw, and how they recorded it for later use, varied greatly. They argue that these differences were

due not only to their literal researcher stance, that is, their position in the classroom, but also to the unique set of personal and professional values which they each hold. Similarly, I accept that there are many possible interpretations of one event (Sanger, 1996). In this way, my observations and journal entries are a personal account of my experiences of Bowden School. However, they do include a number of facts: in the science lesson described above there *were* twenty children, one of them *was* Craig and he *did* say "*Fuck*".

I also provide evidence to support my interpretation of what I observed. For example, I would argue that some of the students were not engaged in the formal learning of this science lesson because they were occupied with other activities such as passing notes and waving to friends out of the window. Whilst I do not attempt to conceal my boredom and irritation I counter this with the contrasting view of the teacher, who says at the end of the lesson: "*Seemed all right, don't you think?*" Also each single journal entry is only one small part of a larger portrayal of the cultures of Bowden School. I made use of other observations as well as interviews to check for contradictions and ambiguities between members' actions and beliefs (Stanley, 1989).

As an LSA/researcher the dual nature of my role was at times difficult to maintain. In practical terms, during some lessons I was fully occupied as an LSA and so found it difficult to find the time to write my journal notes until after such lessons had ended. However, in many more lessons I was far less busy because teachers spent a lot of time talking and/or students worked predominantly on mechanical tasks such as copying. On these occasions I was able to write much fuller accounts. I also became concerned that collectively such stories, in which students were passive, might present an unbalanced

portrayal of the teaching and learning I observed. Therefore I took this into account when interpreting my findings.

Occasionally, I encountered ethical problems in my dual role. Wong (1995) discusses a comparable dilemma he faced as a teacher /researcher. He gives as an example, the questioning of a student about a scientific topic. The student became confused and lost the thread of his argument. Wong suggests that as a teacher his duty was to assist the boy's learning by putting him back on track. As a researcher, however, he wanted to extend the student's struggle, despite the boy's growing embarrassment, to understand better the thought processes involved. Similarly, at Bowden School, I regularly had to 'think on my feet' as I tried to maintain a balance between my role as a researcher and actually getting on with the job of LSA. For example, I was supporting in a lesson in which both the students and the teacher seemed to be getting increasingly out of control. As an LSA I was responsible for helping to calm things down, however, as a researcher I was also interested to see how the lesson would progress. By the time I realised the need to intervene was imperative, it was too late. The teacher focused on the misdemeanours of one particular student who was, I think, severely and unfairly punished.

Documentary evidence

I examined two types of documentary evidence to address my research questions in relationship to Bowden School: local archives and documents provided by the school. For the former I spent a day with the archivist of Markston City Library gaining an historical background to educational provision in the city as well as finding out about the geographical area surrounding the school. This supported my exploration of the school's

cultures in time and space. Evidence from these materials, summarised in Figure 2:1, is incorporated into Chapter Five, *Introducing Bowden School*.

Figure 2:1 Archive search at Markston City Library

1. *A Brief Outline of Elementary Education in England and the City of Markston Since 1800* (1962, revised 1990)
 - Written by a local historian/officer for Markston Education Authority
 - Provides a useful context for Bowden School.
 - Divided into three parts:
 - General Background to Education in England and Wales.*
 - The Development of Elementary Education in Markston from 1824.*
 - Summary of Changes to Schools with Dates.*
2. *The Story of Bowden* (1992)
 - Written by a local historian
 - Charts changes to geographical area of Bowden from the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth century.
 - Three chapters particularly useful:
 - Bowden School: the First Ten Years*
 - Fifty Years of Change*
 - Twentieth Century Development and Services in Bowden*
3. Extracts from a selection of old books and papers
 - *The History of Shire* (1796): reference to the hamlet of Bowden
 - Old maps of Markston: showing tremendous housing development in Bowden, particularly over the last fifty years
 - Population statistics for Bowden, from 1801
4. Recent local and national government reports
 - *Deprivation and Disadvantage in Shire: Report of the Select Committee* (November, 1995)
 - *Census data* (1991): for local wards
 - *Shire Population Estimates* (1985 – 1993)

During the course of this case study I also collected various documents produced by members of Bowden School. Some were given to me as a member of staff and I became well acquainted with many of these, as they were a necessary part of my work. Others I requested. I was interested in how, what, why and to whom information and ideas were communicated within and by the school. I also kept a copy of all teaching and learning materials that were used in lessons in which I was an LSA. These acted as an aide-memoire for writing my journal and also provided useful evidence particularly for Chapter Nine, *Support Classroom Learning: Valuing Diversity?* Figure 2:2 lists the key school documents used in the case study.

Figure 2:2 Documentary evidence from Bowden School

- *Staff Handbook* (staff list, timetables, students' behaviour policy, etc.)
- *Weekly Diaries* of events in and visitors to the school
- *Daily Bulletin Sheets* - information for students and staff
- Materials from two school staff development days
- *School Prospectus* for parents/carers
- Copies of letters to parents/carers
- Public exam results for 1998
- Ofsted reports for 1994 and 1998
- *The Learning Support Departmental Handbook*
- Agendas and minutes of the learning support department's meetings
- Records of individual students kept by the learning support department (primary reports, tests scores, timetables, Individual Education Plans, statements of 'special educational needs', etc.)
- Statistical data and support materials from the Language Support Team
- Teaching materials from lessons in which I supported students
- Teaching materials from reading and mathematics workshops

Interviewing members of Bowden School

I interviewed members of the school for a number of reasons. First, I set out to gain a range of perspectives on ideas and themes pertinent to the research. Second, I wanted to establish which issues members themselves considered to be important about the school. Third, I hoped to support, challenge and clarify ideas which had been raised through my observations of the school and scrutiny of its documentation. I chose to conduct the interviews after I had completed most of my time as an LSA at the school. This was because I wanted to get to know the school well so that I would be better informed about which questions I wanted to ask. Also, I was concerned that if I interviewed members of the school whilst still working there, it might affect their attitudes to me as an LSA. Finally, I hoped that if the interviewees had time to get to know me they would be more comfortable about being interviewed and therefore more candid in their responses. I tape recorded and transcribed each interview. I offered each person the opportunity to read through the transcriptions to make comments and amendments: none chose to do so.

During the interviews I endeavoured to listen *“attentively, sensitively and with respect”* (Atkinson *et al*, 1997, p.8). Later, when editing the transcriptions I tried to maintain the integrity of individuals’ voices: what Rudduck describes as the dynamic qualities of dignity and truth (1993, p.19). I also took note of Atkinson *et al*’s criticism of those researchers who take away ownership of stories from the teller through the process of compiling them into *“research themes”* (*op cit.*, p.8). I have therefore attempted to let individuals’ voices be heard by quoting them at length, whilst accepting Clifford’s argument that *“quotations are always staged by the quoter”* (1988, p.50).

I talked to a range of staff from across different subject areas and with a variety of responsibilities in the school. I also selected some staff because there were specific issues I wanted to discuss with them which related to their role in the school. For example, I wished to understand how the school's timetable was constructed and therefore I arranged to talk to Mary Butler, one of the deputy headteachers, who was responsible for this. Figure 2:3 below provides a list of the staff interviewed.

Figure 2:3 Staff interviewed at Bowden School

- Headteacher and lives locally: David Roberts
- Deputy headteacher, plus learning support teacher and lives locally: Mary Butler
- Deputy headteacher, plus history teacher: Harry Hopkins
- Head of house, plus music teacher: Laura Clark
- Longest serving member of staff at school, 'Alternative Curriculum' coordinator, plus design and technology teacher and lives locally: Sandra Stephens
- Head of learning support department, plus physical education teacher: Philip Cleary
- Senior LSA and lives locally: Jane Lee
- LSA and lives locally with children attending the school: Carol Marina (daughter Isabel)
- LSA and lives locally with children attending the school: Joanna York
- Head of language support team: Eleanor Wharton

I interviewed more staff from the learning support department than from elsewhere. I considered this necessary for a number of reasons. First, I wanted to compare the experiences of other LSAs with my own. Second, this was the department with which I was most familiar and so it formed an important

context for my study. Third, understanding how this department worked was necessary for the development of Chapter Nine, *Supporting Classroom Learning: Valuing Diversity?* Also a number of LSAs lived locally and some had children at the school therefore I could draw on their knowledge of their relationship between the school and its local communities.

Each interview consisted of two types of questions. The first set was for all interviewees: its purpose being to explore their perceptions of the school and its cultures and ideas of participation. The second set of questions was specific to individual interviewees, such as the example above of the deputy headteacher and timetabling responsibilities. Some of the questions were based on ideas and concerns that had grown out of my observations of the school. I also drew on the work of Booth and Ainscow (1998) in which they provide researchers with a list of *Suggested Information about the School*. I focused on those issues which related closely to the study such "school and community", "categorisation policies and practices", "learning development and support policies" and "participation" (p.10). The questions I then developed acted as an *aide memoire* during the interviews. Sometimes it was not necessary to ask each one specifically because a member of staff would talk about a topic in such a way as to cover a number of related questions simultaneously. However, before each interview ended I checked that none had been omitted. A copy of all staff interview questions is provided in the appendix.

I organised three sets of group interviews with students. The first of these was with three students in year thirteen, two boys and one girl, all of whom grew up and lived locally to the school. I decided to interview them together because, as they did not know me well, I thought doing so would be more

comfortable for them. Also, since I was interested in their recollections of the school from when they were in year seven, I hoped that by talking as a group they would be able to stimulate one another's memories. I asked them to tell me stories about the school.

The second set of student interviews was with two groups of students in year eight. The members of the first group, eight boys and seven girls, were already familiar with me. I had supported this mixed attainment class once a week during in the autumn term for Personal and Social Education (PSE). Their teacher, Hannah Stirling, made use of the 'circle time' technique to encourage group discussion and I had joined in with these lessons. I asked if I could use this forum to encourage the students to talk about their school and she agreed. She also offered me the opportunity to conduct a second group interview with a parallel class, to whom she also taught PSE. This became my third set of student interviews with ten girls and six boys.

We discussed how best to organise these two sessions. By chance, I was also involved in devising a secondary school student rating scale as part of the *Index for Inclusion* project. Its intention was to explore students' perceptions of school cultures, policies and practices as well as ideas around processes of participation and barriers to participation. Hannah Stirling and I agreed that we would ask the students to complete the draft rating scale on their own and then use their responses as stimuli for a group discussion. In this way I would be able to trial the rating scale for the *Index* project as well as gather additional information about Bowden School. I used a dictaphone to record the two discussions. Students were asked to pass the machine around the circle and to wait to speak until they were holding it. This helped to structure the talk as well as allowing less forthright students the opportunity to make a

contribution. The ensuing discussion ranged around a number of topics as directed by the students. These included: school uniform; other rules; punishments and rewards; friendships and bullying; the state of students' lavatories; the quality of the food in the canteen; relationships with staff. Below are the journal notes I wrote after the first of these group interviews.

Journal extract: PSE lesson year eight

This activity went much better than I had expected. The students took it terribly seriously and generally did not interrupt each other. A number came up to me afterwards to add further comments, which surprised me as it was lunchtime. They also responded well to passing the tape recorder. They seemed to want to let me know what they thought – they were articulate in their own way and felt strongly, I think, about what they said.

(Ref: 11/5/4)

Some Reflections on Finding Out

By presenting the methods and methodological approaches of the study in the form of this chapter I may have created an illusion of order which belies the reality of my research experiences. Each part of this study connects with the rest: it is overlapping, continuous and continuing. Themes from my reading resonated with my experiences in Bowden School; writing my *Autobiographical Tales* informed my understanding of methodological approaches to explore people's lives. Each stage informed and directed the next. The deadline for producing the written thesis was a necessary restraint, however it brought about a closure which was only partial. My interest in school cultures and participation remains.

Disorder in my methods and methodologies also came in the guise of the unexpected: the accidental and serendipitous. Some were rooted in the research process itself, others were as a result of personal circumstances. Like all surprises such changes can be agreeable, even exciting but they can also be problematic and unwelcome. For example, I was unable to interview a member of staff from Bowden School whose stories I was particularly interested in hearing. She always told me she was too busy until I finally accepted that in fact she did not want to talk to me. I still wonder what I might have found out if she had changed her mind. I had also intended to visit Norway as part of this study. A week before I was due to leave, my family was involved in a car accident. Instead of going abroad I stayed in hospital looking after my ten year-old son. A few weeks later my husband underwent major surgery, followed by a lengthy convalescence. In practical terms these events changed the course of my research as I was forced to stop working for seven months. They also affected me personally and this too had an impact on the thesis.

During the course of the study unplanned events occurred with more positive consequences. An example of this is the opportunistic nature of reading. Although I compiled lists of books and articles and set myself reading tasks, I was still delighted by the chance encounter with a text that challenged and extended my understanding. Early on in the study I read two very different books on photography, never having read one on the subject before. Both have subsequently found a place in the thesis (Barthes, 1982; Spence, 1986) and helped me to rethink what I am doing when I am observing people in schools. I was also, unexpectedly, funded by UNESCO to visit India. Whilst it is not possible to include very much of this experience in the thesis, my visits to

schools in Mumbai and Chennai informed my understanding of participation and barriers to a participation in a profound way.

Finally, the methodology of the study is itself a search for order. I listened to what members of Bowden School told me in conversations and formal interviews. I interpreted what I saw and heard whilst observing members of the school at work and play. I scrutinised numerous school documents. However, none of these sources of information was unproblematic. Do interviewees really say what they believe? Are their ideas and opinions consistent over time and in different contexts? What about discrepancies between people's words and actions? Do documents reflect what happens in practice? And how far do my beliefs and values as a researcher colour my understanding of what I see, hear and read? In this chapter I have set out the ways in which I have endeavoured to answer these methodological questions. The subsequent chapters scrutinise the evidence I gathered through reading and by exploring my own and others' experiences of schools.

CHAPTER THREE

READING TO DEVELOP CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDINGS

"We read to understand or begin to understand."

(Manguel, 1996, p.7)

In this chapter I consider the reading that I have undertaken as part of the study and consider how it has helped me to develop my understanding of the thesis's key concepts. The chapter is in three sections. Sections one and two relate to the first research question, '*What are school cultures?*' whilst section three focuses on the second question, '*What is participation?*' Together these sections provide a theoretical basis for the remainder of the thesis: the *Autobiographical Tales* and the case study of Bowden School. As Manguel notes, reading helps us "*to begin to understand*". The processes of reading for, thinking about and constructing this chapter has given me the opportunity to draw on the ideas and interpretations of a range of writers. In doing so I have questioned not only their conceptual understandings but also my own.

In section one I examine the concept of culture and then in the following section I explore how it has been applied to schools and other educational contexts. This balance reflects the structure of my reading activities as explained in Chapter Two, *Methodological Considerations*. That is, my dissatisfaction with how the concept of culture has been applied to schools in educational texts and my decision to read about it outside of education to establish more clearly its meaning before then relating it myself to schools. In section three I begin by considering some terms associated with the concept of participation in schools and in particular I focus on the notions of inclusion and exclusion. I then explore the relationship between this set of concepts and

that of participation and barriers to participation. I end by discussing why the latter is more appropriate to developing my understanding of school cultures.

Reading and Understanding the Concept of Culture

"Culture is so implicit in what we do that it dulls our knowledge that it is there."

(Finnan and Levin, 2000, p.88)

Finnan and Levin highlight an inherent difficulty in our understanding of the concept of culture: its complexity is obscured by its pervasiveness in our lives. This is further complicated by the recent *"pervasive usage"* of the word itself: *"appended to virtually any sphere of activity to signal its distinctiveness and otherness"* (Alexander, 2000, p.164). In UK politics, the concept is reduced, at times, to the status of a single issue. When a link was suggested between poverty and the low attainment of some school students Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, warned teachers against operating within *"a culture of excuses"* (1999). More prosaically, the then school's minister, Charles Clark, speaking at a conference about the role of information and communication technology in schools, stated that it was the government's intention to *"create an ICT culture in the classroom"* (1999).

Deal (1988) offers a common-sense definition of culture as being, *"The way we do things around here"* (p.203). However, this raises more questions than it answers: What *"things"*? Who are *"we"*? And where is *"here"*? Indeed, the act of defining culture is, in itself, a culturally and historically bound activity. As Williams (1977) explains:

"Culture... through variation and complication, embodies not only the issues but the contradictions through which it has developed. The

concept at once fuses and confuses the radically different experiences and tendencies of its formation.”
(p.11)

Williams goes on to outline how the concept's multiplicity of meanings has developed over time from its early eighteenth century usage as, *"A process: the culture of something - crops, animals, minds"*. By the end of that century the term was more commonly used as a noun, for example to describe 'the arts', referring back to the notion of a 'cultured mind' as belonging to someone who has 'cultivated' an interest in, say, literature, fine art and classical music. More recently, 'the arts' may be divided into 'high' and 'low' culture with all the attendant assumptions that such labels carry. Williams then illustrates how, during the mid-nineteenth century, the term culture began to be used to describe, what he calls, *"a whole way of life"* (*op cit.*, p.13). Tylor (1871), a British anthropologist, writing at that time, offered the following definition:

"That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, and custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man (sic) as a member of society."
(p.1)

More than a century later, Prosser (1991) highlights a not dissimilar list of features in order to clarify the meaning of school culture:

"Values and beliefs, norms of behaviour, social structures, social systems, social groups, status, roles, control systems, rituals, traditions."
(p.xii.)

In the remainder of this section I too offer my own set of concepts to help explore the central idea of culture, as summarised in Figure 3:1. Each element has been selected because it has grown out of, and resonated with, both my reading and my experiences of schools and also my understanding of the processes of participation and barriers to participation.

Figure 3:1 Six elements towards understanding the concept of culture

- how cultures are bound by time and space
- the relationship between cultures and individuals
- identity and belonging
- language and ideology
- power and control
- behaviours: 'normal' and 'other'

There are some similarities between my choice of concepts and those chosen by both Tylor and Prosser. However, none is unproblematic: notions such as *beliefs* or *behaviours*, for example, are themselves understood differently within different cultural contexts. Also, all six elements are interrelated. So, in understanding the relationship between an individual and their cultures it seems necessary to examine both over time, in terms of their past, present and future, as well as space, both literal and metaphorical. Doing so requires a consideration of how people identify themselves and are identified by others. Language forms an important part of this. A sense of belonging is strengthened by such shared behaviours, however this may also be used as a form of control to ensure that individuals conform to acceptable notions of 'normality' within the culture. The interrelationships are reflected in the following discussion.

Boundaries of time and space

All cultures are created by their past, present and possible futures. They are therefore both sustained and changeable (Williams, 1977). Carrithers (1992) points out that unless the historical context of a culture is taken into account

there is a danger of presenting “a sort of miraculous virgin birth of cultures” (p.9). He discusses the problem of writing about a culture in the present tense and argues that doing so may not only describes how it is, but might also wrongly suggest how it has always been and will be.

The past shapes a collective sense of who we are: how we identify ourselves and others, as well as how we are identified *by* others. It helps to form the present values and beliefs that are shared within a culture. Thompson (1978) argues that not only does the historicity of collective cultural traditions give meaning to actions and events in the present, but it also limits and shapes the future, although not in a straightforwardly causal or deterministic way.

“For any living generation, in any ‘now’, the ways in which they ‘handle’ experience defies prediction and escapes from any narrow definition of determination.”
(p.363)

An understanding of school cultures, as well as attempts to change them, therefore necessarily requires an exploration of their pasts. The historical contexts of a school are many. Not only are there former and current global, national and local influences but there is also the impact of the personal experiences brought into a school by its various members. Every person carries his or her own cultural histories.

All cultures have literal and metaphorical boundaries of space and these may be more, or less, permeable with and to other cultures. A school may be understood in terms of its boundaries as an institution. However, as Holliday (2000) points out, no institution exists as a discrete culture separate from the rest of reality. Rather, he describes them as “small cultures” forming part of a “mezzo world” which:

"Stretches seamlessly across an on-going multi-layered complex. It represents the coral gardens of human interaction, of which any demarcation of specific small cultures will only scratch the surface."

(p.260)

Bhabha (1994) applies the notion of cultural *"in-between"* or *"interstitial"* spaces to describe how a person may lose their sense of belonging when trying to operate in more than one culture and so not feeling comfortable in any (pp.1,3). He describes this as being *"unhomely"* (p.9); of being displaced into an uneasy border world in which *"extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations"* take place. For members of a school's community it may create a sense of not 'fitting in', not feeling comfortable.

Sibley (1995) also uses the image of cultural borders or *"boundaries"* which are erected by groups of people to keep out those who are *"other"*.

"Crossing boundaries, from a familiar space to an alien one which is under the control of somebody else, can provide anxious moments; in some circumstances it could be fatal, or it might be an exhilarating experience - the thrill of transgression... Boundaries in other circumstances provide security and comfort."

(p.32)

Thus these borders and boundaries create metaphorical spaces in and between cultures which protect some to the exclusion of others. As such, they *"articulate beliefs about belonging and not belonging"* (p. 43). He describes this process in Kleinian psychoanalytical term.

"Yet, the urge to make separations, between clean and dirty, ordered and disordered, 'us' and 'them', that is, to expel the abject [creates] feelings of anxiety because such separations can never finally be achieved".

(p. 8)

Sibley's notion of *"abjection"* is related to Bhabha's idea of being *"unhomely"* although their emphasis is different. The former is about people rejecting that which is 'other' and the latter is about being the rejected 'other'. However, both

writers point out the inherent prejudice of cultures and argue for greater tolerance of diversity.

In a school there are many spaces which create and perpetuate notions of 'them' and 'us', fear and safety, prejudice and tolerance (McGregor, 2001). They all have literal and metaphorical meanings. To paraphrase Sibley, they may represent anxiety, security and/or exhilaration to different members of a school. Examples include: staff rooms and playgrounds; grouping arrangements for teaching students; the stereotyping of members by staff and students on the basis of, say, gender, ethnicity, class or sexuality. A school's cultures are also part of, and are shaped by, its wider geographical and metaphorical spaces, in terms of local, national/societal and global cultures. Staff, students and parents/carers also bring with them, through the school gates, their experiences from their families, local communities and friends.

Cultures and individuals

Exploring a culture helps us to comprehend more clearly the lives of the people who are members of it. At the same time, however, examining a person's life allows us a greater insight into the cultures to which s/he belongs. Through George Eliot's (1872) portrayal of individual characters, the cultures of *Middlemarch* are revealed, whilst her descriptions of this town increases our understanding of not only of the people who inhabit it but also of other lives, in other times and places. Her characterisation of Doctor Lydgate, for example, both exposes the strengths and weaknesses of nineteenth century provincial life, but it is also through that exposure that we come to know something about what it is to be a doctor, or a husband, or a

man of unfulfilled ambitions. It is the exploration of the interrelationship between individuals' lives and their cultures that is therefore necessary.

One approach to understanding this interrelationship is to consider people in terms of the social structures with which they might identify themselves, or be identified by others, such as gender, class, ethnicity, dis/ability and so forth. Thompson (1978), however, points out the limitations of doing so. He illustrates his argument in a humorous manner by describing a hypothetical person in some detail. She is female, a wife, mother, mistress, worker, shop steward, treasurer to her local Labour party, amateur violinist and occasional church attender. Thompson wryly states, "*As you will see she is kept very busy*". He then asks the following question:

"Is the woman then no more than a point at which all these relations, structures, roles, expectations, functions and norms intersect: is she the carrier of all of them, simultaneously, and is she acted by them, and absolutely determined at their intersection?" (p.343)

He argue that a person can not be "*constructed from a conceptual Meccano set*" (p.357) in this way. He is dismissive of such a reductionist and deterministic interpretation which ignores the complexity and multiplicity of people's lives.

Nevertheless it is not possible to ignore what it means to be, for example, male and not female, black instead of white, able bodied or disabled, or indeed a black able bodied man rather than a white disabled woman. To do so would risk being colour-blind (Gillborn, 1999), gender-blind or disability-blind in one's understanding of cultures. For, as Schostak and Logan (1984) note, "*People are born into structures of prejudice*" (p.126). The ways in which we identify ourselves and are identified by others must be acknowledged and explored. Blair *et al* (1998), in their study of multi-ethnic schools, argue

strongly that ethnic monitoring should be incorporated into the routine practices of schools. They maintain that:

"Rather than reinforcing stereotypes, the results of ethnic monitoring help to break down crude assumptions and raise questions about practice for further investigation." (p.11)

However, Erben (1998) points out that whilst

"Socio-economic features are inescapable and causal... so too are specific inter-subjective socialising relationships." p.8)

An individual's life is partly formed within and by the social structures of his/her cultures but it is also clearly more than just those structures. As Erben continues, by drawing on Sartre's biographical study of Flaubert:

"While Valéry was unquestionably a petit-bourgeois intellectual not every petit-bourgeois intellectual was Valéry."

Identity and belonging

Our identity/ies and the sense in which we belong and do not belong to different cultures are closely related. For example, linked to Williams's idea of *"a whole way of life"* (op cit.) is the concept of culture being used to describe the notion of national identity. Implicit in this is that members of one country share a set of characteristics - a way of life - which somehow distinguishes them from those of other nations. Norman Tebbit concurred with this understanding when, at the Conservative party conference of 1990, he attempted to reject the idea of the UK being a multicultural society. His test of loyalty to national identity was based on which international cricket team an Englishman (sic) might support. When later asked about his comments, he argued that the question, which any person who has immigrated to the UK had to ask, was: *"Are you still looking back to where you came from, or where you are?"* (1990).

Tebbit appears to be seeking a cultural assimilation that is neither desirable nor possible. It is not desirable because it is premised on a notion of reproducing 'Englishness', whatever that might mean, through the process of 'subordinate' ethnic groups taking on the values and beliefs of the 'dominant' group, rather than all being enriched through their mutual contact. It is not possible because it denies not only the history of the UK as an island which has been peopled by immigrant populations for centuries but also the complex reality of an individual's *"lived experiences"* (Thompson, *op cit.*). For, as Said (1993) explains:

"Labels, like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind." (p.336)

Finding, and being at ease with, our identity/ies and sense of belonging is not straightforward. Dabydeen (1989) explains his dilemma as a writer of fiction: he can either identify himself as being *"black"* or *"universal"* which, as he points out, actually means writing *"like a white man"*.

"Either you drop the epithet 'black' and think of yourself as a 'writer' (a few of us foolishly embrace this position, desirous of the status of 'writing' and knowing that 'black' is blighted) – that is you cease dwelling on the nigger/tribal/nationalistic theme, you cease folkling up the literature and you become 'universal' – or else you perish in the backwater of small presses." (pp.12-3)

Dabydeen's difficulty is not so much about how he identifies himself but the processes of *"identification"* to which he is subjected by others (Bhabha, 1994). The term *"institutionalised racism"* has secured an uncomfortable place in the English language as a result of the Macpherson Report (1999) on the murder of Stephen Lawrence. This has drawn attention to far-reaching and systemic racial intolerance and discrimination within the Metropolitan Police Force and elsewhere. Likewise, schools must also be recognised as places of

institutionalised racism in which the sense of belonging experienced by students, parents/carers and staff is partly determined by institutionalised processes of identification (Mac en Ghaill, 1988; Bourne *et al*, 1994; Gillborn, 1999).

Language and ideology

Wittgenstein (1922) argued that *"the limits of my language mean the limits of my world"* (p.115). As Dabydeen illustrates, the way in which we communicate helps to demonstrate and determine what we are and who we are. Cultures have their own 'languages' which help to create a sense of identity and belonging amongst members. This includes a first language such as English, Punjabi, Mandarin or British Sign Language as well as subtle variations in styles, accents and vocabularies. A person usually has recourse to more than one 'language' in the same way that s/he belongs to multiple cultures. For example, a student who mainly speaks Punjabi at home and English at school will also use many different versions, or codes, of both of these 'languages'. Code-switching takes place over time and space and is largely dependent on cultural contexts: friends, family, teachers, and so forth (Honey, 1989).

A variety of languages can enrich the experiences of members of different cultures or it may create barriers between them. For example, at a basic level in schools, barriers are experienced when a student does not understand the language in which a lesson is conducted. However, barriers also can be more subtle. There is within and between cultures a hierarchy of languages. Honey (*op cit.*) gives an example of this from the late nineteenth century. He describes how members of the dominant culture within English public schools spoke Received Pronunciation regardless of the accents and dialogues local to the

school or the students' homes. New students who spoke with regional accents *"were simply shamed out of them by the pressure of the school's 'public opinion'."* As for teachers:

"A weak disciplinarian would find that his accent became another stick with which they would beat or bait him. In a popular man... mildly non-standard speech forms were tolerated – even humoured – as part of the idiosyncrasies of a 'character'." (p.27)

This pressure, on students and staff, to conform to a certain way of talking is still prevalent, although in some schools speaking Received Pronunciation might be an incitement to bullying. I recently witnessed a young female teacher struggling to teach a year eleven class in a school outside London. A group of male students loudly repeated back to her every word that she spoke in order to mock her Liverpudlian accent.

Language is also a means by which individuals and groups may be categorised and stereotyped by others: to position them in, or push them outside, a culture. Sibley (1995) draws on a powerful example from Nazi Germany in which, as part of their anti-Semitic propaganda, Jews were described as rats. Sibley explains that this particular image was used because it carried with it potent images of,

"Disease, prolific breeding, sewers, shit, violating boundaries by entering people's homes." (p.27)

In schools, educational terminology and jargon, such as 'lower' and 'upper' sets, 'non-reader', 'high-flyer' and 'emotionally and behaviourally disturbed', are used to identify and categorise students. Corbett's (1995) analysis of the language of 'special educational needs' illustrates not only the inadequacy of this and related labels but also their damaging effects on students' learning. Other categorisations in schools may be more colloquial: for example, the everyday speech used by some staff in the staffroom and classrooms to

describe students. I have heard all of the following used to characterise students: *"thick", "clever", "bone-idle", "slag", "ugly", "cow", "demented"*. Racist, sexist and homophobic comments by any members of a school also define and confine its cultures.

The language of education is also part of a wider political discourse. That is: *"What can be said and thought, also... who can speak, when, and with what authority"* (Ball, 1990, p.2). Cultures are diffused with ideologies and language is part of their control mechanisms. Ball goes on to argue that schools are not only:

"Subject to discourse but are also centrally involved in the propagation and selective dissemination of discourses."

The current ideology in UK schools has been shaped by the discourses of past Conservative and current Labour governments based around a belief in the *"marketisation of education"* (Power and Whitty, 1999) in which for certain schools to be successful others must fail (Whitty, 1997). These values are encapsulated in the government document *Choice and Diversity* with its *"five great themes"* of:

"Competition, quality, parental choice, school autonomy and accountability."
(DfEE, 1992)

'Beacon status' schools co-exist, literally and metaphorically, alongside others designated as 'failing' or being in 'special measures'. The tools of this ideology include Ofsted inspections, compulsory testing of students, the publication of league tables and more recently a sharp increase in the number of *"specialist"* schools at secondary level (DfEE, 2001). Ironically, this belief in the benefits of a diversity of schools is part of the same discourse that has *"the aim of producing children who fit a standardised ideal"* (Shostak, 2000, p.41).

"Its language is one of benchmarking, standards, standardisation, comparisons with competitors and engineering children" (op cit., p.38).

That is, through the provision of different schools, to produce a standardised outcome for education.

Power and control

Foucault (1977), like Schostak, also draws attention to what he calls the *"power of normalisation"* in institutions (p.308). All cultures are shaped by the notion of power, which may be used both to control and to liberate the behaviours and attitudes of their members.

"Power produces knowledge... Power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose or constitute at the same time power relations." (op cit., p.27)

In a school, policies and practices reflect and determine power. These may be ideologically based impositions by governments or decisions made and action taken by members within individual schools. How, what and by whom decisions are made are indicators of power relationships in the cultures of a school. Ball (1990) explains:

"Education works not only to render its students as subjects of power, it also constitutes them, or some of them, as powerful subjects. The effects of power are both positive and negative." (p.5)

Those who are identified with being powerful may be valued more highly than those who are not. Therefore notions of being worthy and worthless are associated with power. Members of a school may choose to shift the balance of power to one that is based on more democratic participation. However, such changes are most easily instigated by those who are already powerful.

Those with the power to make changes also have the “*power to punish*” (Foucault, 1977, p.23). They are able to determine a culture’s rules as well as exercise control over others’ behaviour through the use of sanctions and rewards. No culture can exist without rules. As a character in Alan Bennett’s play, *Getting On*, notes:

“We started off trying to set up a small anarchist community but people wouldn’t obey the rules.”

Douglas (1973), in her collection of readings, emphasises how an understanding of rules can lead to insights about different cultures. She provides many examples, from nineteenth century dinner party etiquette, to the code governing marriage and incest in Nuer society. These illustrate how rules and conventions are not only an essential part of any culture but they also help to explain its meanings. Rules provide individuals with group identity and knowing the rules enhances a person’s sense of belonging. Rules help to regulate behaviour through rewards and punishments in response to either conformity or non-compliance.

Some rules are explicit but many are only tacitly acknowledged.

“Societies may be seen as very complex ‘games’, which sometimes afford very material evidences as to their character (the pitch, the goals, the teams), sometimes are governed by visible rules (rule-books of law and constitution), and sometimes governed by invisible rules, which the players know so deeply that they are never spoken, and which must be inferred by the observer. (p.345)

It is not difficult to stretch Thompson’s (1978) analogy to a school. The “*material evidence*” is the buildings, equipment, staff and students, the “*visible rules*” are the official school rules and the “*invisible rules*” are the ‘hidden curriculum’. However, in any school there are various games being played simultaneously. Each of the cultures within a school will have their own sets

of rules and these may be in conflict with others'. Members of a school may inadvertently break a rule because they do not know all the different codes of behaviour, particularly those which are *"invisible"*. Others may knowingly break a rule from one culture in a school because it is in conflict with the code of another culture with which they also identify. One game takes precedence over another. Mac en Ghail (1994), for example, has highlighted how for some working class white male teenagers, academic success matters less than peer approval; although this attitude is not, of course, exclusive to white, working-class boys.

Behaviours: 'normal' and 'other'

Pearson (1974), in discussing the notion of what constitutes 'normal' behaviour, argues that:

A man (sic) can only relax in the company of others whose behaviour he can anticipate and predict. Because uncertainty and friction within a group hinders co-operation and negates the purpose of social life, it is essential that newcomers to a social group should learn the likes and dislikes, the views and attitudes, indeed, the total value system of the group they are joining." (p. 164)

In schools it is not always easy to *"anticipate and predict"* what will happen and *"uncertainty and friction"* often prevail. Pearson's imperative that new members learn *"the total value system of the group"*, equates assimilation and sameness – *normality* - with safety. He does not address the dangers of dullness and, more importantly, prejudice and intolerance. His analysis does not allow that outsiders – those who are *other* – may enrich the lives of existing members *because* they are unknown, new and different.

Furthermore, as Sibley (1995) notes, members of dominant cultures, and dominant groups within cultures, are no more *normal* than those whom they consider to be *other*. The behaviour of the former is acceptable and accepted because of their domination. He reminds us to consider “*the curious practices of this majority, the oddness of the ordinary*” (p.x). Similarly, practices in a school are accepted because they concur with the behaviours, values and beliefs of its dominant cultures. What would seem ‘normal’ in one school might seem ‘other’ elsewhere. Alexander (2000) highlights, in his study of primary schools across five countries, not only similarities between schools but also sharp differences in what is considered to be acceptable behaviours; for example, the manner in which students are expected to address teachers.

Reading and Understanding School Cultures

“The culture of a school is a curious melange of the work of the young artists making culture for themselves and old artists making culture for the young; it is also mixed with such bits of culture as children have been able to appropriate... It will illustrate well the mingling of cultures if we divide the tradition which clusters about the school into three classes: tradition which comes entirely or in part from outside the school, tradition which in part is indigenous, and tradition which is almost entirely indigenous. It is roughly true that tradition of the first class exists in the community at large, in the second class among teachers, and that of the third class among students.” (Waller, 1932, p.108)

It is seventy years since Waller identified not only the “*separate culture of the school*” but also highlighted the complexity of the concept: “*a curious melange... mixed... mingling... clusters*”. This seems unsurprising since the concept of culture is, itself, complex and, as already discussed in Chapter One, “*real schools and real lives*” comprise “*messiness and inconsistencies*”

(Booth and Ainscow, 1998, p.2). However, a review of more recent literature indicates a range of writers who are more, or less, successful at acknowledging and addressing these issues. Prosser (1999) provides a useful survey of what he calls 'school culture research'. He outlines four "broad categories": these are (i) "wider culture", (ii) "generic culture", (iii) "unique culture" and (iv) "perceived culture" (pp.7-9).

Four "broad categories" of school culture

By "**wider culture**" Prosser means the impact of the world beyond the school gates. He explains that:

"National and local cultures are impregnated into and are part of all schools... it is a myth to consider schools as enclaves operating a separate reality to that outside of their walls." (op cit., p.8)

For example, in Potts's (1998b) examination of education in Hong Kong, she notes that in UK primary schools the teaching of literacy focuses on reading skills whereas in Chinese schools the emphasis is on writing. This is because English as a written language is represented phonetically whilst written Chinese languages, such as Mandarin, are represented graphically.

However, the "*wider school*" reaches beyond national cultures, as suggested by Prosser, to include the impact of globalisation on educational provision. Halsey *et al* (1997), for example, question the relationship between education and national economies in an increasingly global market. The "*wider school*" is also more focused than Prosser's "*local or regional manifestations [and] a vast array of socio-cultural systems*" (op cit., p.8). The cultures of a school shape, and are shaped by, the personal/private lives that each member brings with them

every day into school: that is, their individual *“lived experiences”* (Thompson, *op cit.*).

In his second and third categories, Prosser discriminates between the *“generic culture”* of all schools and the *“unique culture”* of any single school. Both of these terms make reference to the notion of institutional cultures. The former suggests that all schools share cultural features which makes them recognisably different from other institutions such as hospitals or prisons. The latter notes that, at the same time, no school is exactly like any other. This is what Finnan and Levin describe as *“both the sameness and uniqueness of each school”* (2000, p.87). Exploring cultural similarities and differences between schools and other institutions is also revealing. Hoskin’s (1990) analysis of Foucault’s (1977) study of prisons, for example, draws a number of useful parallels with schools. He refers to the Foucauldian metaphor of the panopticon, or all-seeing eye of surveillance and judgement that controls even when it is not looking. Through this he explores the relationship between the ‘micro-technologies’ of discipline and examination, which, he argues, are to be found in the institutional cultures of both prisons and schools.

Prosser’s final category is the *“perceived culture”* of a school: that is, how a school is perceived to be, which may, or may not, be how it really is. He argues that parents, for example, understand a school through impressionistic elements such as its *“prospectus, newsletters, gossip, pupils’ behaviour outside school, the uniform”* (p.8). Although, Prosser is right to suggest that these provide only limited insights into a school’s cultures they are still a meaningful part of the picture. And, anyway, as Clifford (1986a) notes, our understanding

of cultures is only ever a “*partial truth*”; it is always both incomplete and personal.

Different terms for different understandings?

Prosser notes that the “*perceived culture*” of a school is sometimes referred to as its “*‘atmosphere’, ‘character’, ‘ethos’ or ‘tone’*” (op cit., p.9). I have also come across the terms “*climate*” (for example, Coleman, 1996), “*environment*” (Fullan, 1985) and “*setting*” (Sarason, 1971). It is not always easy to identify why a writer chooses one particular term rather than another. Indeed, different terms may appear to be used interchangeably, within a single book, chapter, paragraph and even sentence, as illustrated below by Ballard and McDonald (1998):

“The climate, or ‘culture’ engendered in the school of a supportive environment for adults and children is clearly recognised and valued by the parents.” (p.90, my emphases)

Here, *climate* and *culture* are presented as synonymous, although the latter is distinguished by inverted commas, and both are described as growing out of the *environment*, suggesting that the latter is, in some ways, more deeply rooted. In some texts one term is subsumed into another: For example, Bassey and Yeomans (1989) discuss how “*an ethos of collegiality*” is an important feature of “*school climate*” (p.219). However, despite these disparities of usage it is possible to discern some patterns in the choice of terms found in the literature.

‘**Ethos**’, for example, is probably the word most regularly used by staff and parents/carers to describe a school and most commonly found in a school’s own documentation. For example, at Bowden School the *Staff Handbook* specifically notes that the headteacher is responsible for “*school ethos*” as well

as, the not necessarily unconnected, "*public relations and publicity*". Allder (1993) highlights the term's intangible qualities:

"That elusive item... so difficult to recognise, measure or improve, is the unique, pervasive atmosphere or mood of the organisation... recognised initially on an experiential rather than a cognitive level." (p.69)

Despite these difficulties of definition, a number of studies have focused on the concept of 'school ethos'. One of the most influential has been *Fifteen Thousand Hours* in which Rutter and his colleagues (1979) argued that school ethos provides the key to why, amongst apparently similar schools, some are more or less 'successful' than others. They offered this understanding of the concept of ethos:

"A set of values, attitudes and behaviours which will become characteristic of the school as a whole." (Rutter et al, 1979, p.179)

Their study has been subsequently criticised. For example, Tyler (1985) condemns "*the uni-dimensionality of such constructions*" (p.20). Similarly, Elliott (1996) examines Rutter et al's work in his strongly argued critique of 'school effectiveness' research. He notes the early impact of *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, arguing that many of its findings, and other later 'school effectiveness' research projects, are not so much "*enduring truths*" as "*platitudes*" (p.204). Notwithstanding these criticisms, during the 1980s and 1990s, particularly in the UK and north America, there have been numerous studies, building on the work of Rutter and similar research, which have set out to categorise so-called variables relating to school effectiveness or improvement. Such research has often drawn on business and management theories in order to understand schools as organisations or institutions; for example, the importance of 'strong leadership' (Schein, 1985).

The term '**school climate**' is particularly used in quantitative large-scale surveys of schools as part of 'school effectiveness' research. Typically, 'ideal' school climate variables are established and then measured against findings in 'real' schools. For example, Fraser *et al* (1987) use a pair of rating scales in two Australian high schools to evaluate "*classroom*" and "*school climates*". Similarly, Bassey and Yeomans (1989) employ a "*school climate questionnaire*". Finlayson (1987), however, criticises such approaches to understanding schools, arguing that they are not only based on a narrow definition of 'effectiveness' but they also depersonalise the research process. He maintains that such research, which sets out to formulate a "*precise and unambiguous description of reality*", is "*very different from the 'lived-in' space which is experienced by participants in the process of schooling*" (p.168).

Heck and Marcoulides' (1996) research can be seen as typifying some aspects of Finlayson's critique although they use the term 'culture' to explore notions of school effectiveness. In a large scale survey of staff in 156 schools in Singapore they only look at what they describe as "*visible*" aspects of culture, even whilst acknowledging that schools are:

"Socially constructed realities with complex sets of interrelationships among their internal and environmental processes". (p.78)

However, they go on to write:

"While the reduction of reality can be considered a limitation, there is a definite usefulness to such an approach, since it makes a fuzzy field somewhat more accessible."

One might question to whom, as well as to what purpose.

Within school improvement research, '**culture**' is considered in relationship to bringing about sustainable changes – improvements – in schools (for example,

Louis and Smith, 1991; Ainscow *et al*, 1994). Indeed, Hargreaves (1999) suggests that:

"School culture may be a cause, an object or an effect of school improvement: indeed, all three are possible." (p.41)

Dalin (1993) maintains that the long-term goal for any school must be to:

"Move the school culture towards a learning culture, a culture which is able to respond to the needs of students and adults." (p.96)

However, he argues against the school effectiveness model by emphasising the complexity of school cultures and the inappropriateness of comparing schools as institutions with management organisations.

"Even the terms 'effective' or 'productive' do not sound right. These are concepts from a production paradigm with fairly straightforward goals and lines of authority... Schools are much more complex organisations than most industrial enterprises." (pp.10-11)

Both Fullan (1985) and Rosenholtz (1989) draw on the concept of school culture to explore the difficulties of bringing about sustainable changes in schools. For example, Fullan characterises schools, in which change can not be maintained, as having *"turbulent environments"* (p.418). Rosenholtz's model is based on two types of school cultures: those which are *"stuck"*, that is unable to improve because their culture is resistant to change, and those which are *"moving"* because their culture is able to manage change. Stoll and Fink (1996) have expanded on Rosenholtz' work. Their typography is based on five categories of school cultures. It includes the *"moving"* school and four other types: *"cruising"*, *"struggling"*, *"sinking"* and *"strolling"*.

In a later discussion of their work Stoll (1999), whilst arguing that school improvement requires the *"reculturing"* of a school, emphasises that this is a complex process.

"Real improvement cannot come from anywhere other than from within schools themselves, and 'within' is a complex web of values and beliefs, norms, social and power relationships and emotions." (p.47)

The dilemma is that a school can only change – improve – if its culture is receptive to change. However, for some schools this is difficult to bring about without introducing change. As Finnan and Levin (2000) explain:

"Real sustained change... does not occur unless basic beliefs and assumptions also change." (p.90)

School culture, cultures or sub-cultures?

In most texts the term 'school culture' is used in the singular, as illustrated in Figure 3:2. Similarly the terms school climate, environment, setting and so forth are generally used in the singular, whilst ethos does not have a plural.

Figure 3:2 The singular use of 'culture' in educational research

- Deal (1985) argues the need to *"rebuild the culture of educational organisations"* (p.203)
- Hopkins (1989) discusses how inservice training should *"address directly the culture of the school"* (p.96)
- Louis and Smith (1991) reflect on the relationship between *"restructuring teacher engagement and school culture"* (p.34)
- Hargreaves (1999) offers different ways of *"diagnosing your own school culture"* (p.48)

The significance of the singular form is that it implies that a school's culture, or whatever term is used, is some kind of homogeneous and unified entity, as characterised by Prosser's (*op cit.*) category of the *"unique culture"* of a school. And, whilst school culture typologies, such as those already discussed in this

chapter, present a number of *types* of culture, implicit in these models is that a school will match only one of their identified cultural classifications. It seems unlikely, however, that Rosenholtz's (*op cit.*) "*moving*", Fullan's (*op cit.*) "*turbulent*" or Stoll's (*op cit.*) "*cruising*" schools will be experienced as moving, turbulent or cruising by everyone. Schools are made up of people whose lives are diverse, complex and messy. A school is an intricate social place in which multiple cultures co-exist: interacting, colliding, reverberating and influencing one another. Any member of a school belongs to a number of cultures simultaneously (DfEE, 1999a, p.41). Returning to the series of brief quotations in Figure 3:2, they all have more meaning if the word "*culture*" is substituted with "*cultures*".

One research approach to addressing the multiplicities of a school's cultures is to divide a school into different cultural locations. For example, Dalin (1993) distinguishes between the whole school's "*culture*" and the "*climate of its classrooms*", whereas Bruner (1996) discusses the different cultures of the staffroom and the playground. However, whilst these are helpful in some ways they also underplay the interrelationships between these literal and metaphorical boundaries. In a similar manner, other writers group members of a school into sub-cultures, such as studies of "*staff cultures*" (Hargreaves, 1992 and 1994; Nias *et al*, 1989) and those which address "*student cultures*" (Stanley, 1989; Woods, 1990). Indeed, in an earlier study, Woods (1979) focused on the conflicts between these two sub-cultures, as demonstrated in its title, *The Divided School*. Meanwhile, Riddell (1992) splits student sub-culture into "*out-of-school*" and "*within-school*" cultures, in her study of how female students decide which GCSE courses to study.

These divisions, however, are both too narrow and too broad to explore the complexity of school cultures. As Woods (1990) himself notes:

"That [sub-cultures] exist is obvious but the differences within them are also important."
(p.140)

It is also essential to consider the commonalties that exist across so-called sub-cultures: including membership of more than one group. For example, even though a teacher identifies, in some ways, her/himself as belonging to the staff of a school, this is not the only way they make sense of who they are. They will also belong to other groups beyond this role, inside and outside of the school, for example, being a parent/carer. Similarly, students and parents/carers will also have multiple perspectives which cut across specific group identities.

Some educational research sets out to address these concerns by focusing on social structures as a way of understanding school cultures. Thus Blair *et al* (1998), in their study of multi-ethnic schools, whilst concerned mainly with the experiences of students, also consider the relationships between students and staff from different ethnic backgrounds. Leicester (1991) brings together sexuality, ethnicity and gender in schools. Gillborn and Youdell (2000) explore student discrimination in education through a discussion of the interrelationship of poverty, class, ethnicity and gender. Siraj-Blatchford (*ed.*, 1993) provides a collection of papers which focus on the relationship between race and gender in the education of teachers.

Using sub-cultures and/or social structures as a way of researching school cultures makes sense as it helps to make more manageable the complex nature of real schools. It can also ensure that representatives of those members of a school who are less powerful are given the opportunity to be

heard: such as students, members of ethnic minority groups and disabled people. However, the identity of any individual is more than a series of labels (female, white or whatever) or membership of sub-cultures (staff, teacher, English teacher). A number of the writers, to whom I have referred, make particular efforts to see beyond these reductive processes but the danger of doing so remains.

One way of resolving this dilemma is to be found in ethnographic studies, in which researchers may not set out to explore the theoretical concept of school cultures but it is, nevertheless, embedded in their understanding of schools. Examples include Lacey's (1970) study of Hightown Grammar School, King's (1979) exploration of a classroom in an infants school and Ball's (1981) investigation of Beachside Comprehensive School. Methodologically their research is formed around rich, detailed case studies, lasting over several months or more and largely based on participant observations. Therefore, although these and similar studies often make reference to sub-cultures, particularly amongst students and staff, there is a greater sense of the diverse and complex lives of individual school members. This, too, is the approach I have developed in the thesis and particularly in the study of Bowden School. For I agree with Nias (1989) when she argues for *"detailed case studies"*:

"To counter the impression given in many existing theoretical formulations that a school's culture has an existence independent of those who participate in it." (p.145)

In much of the research referred to in this chapter, the writers acknowledge the difficulties they have encountered when attempting to create some order out of what they might mean by school cultures. There appears to be a general frustration about how to get 'under the skin' of a school. Indeed, to return to Prosser (1999), he argues that definitions are not really helpful as they are

inevitably too general. He suggests that research on school cultures would be better served by "*placing greater emphasis on clarifying its meaning within the context of use*" (p.9). That also is one of the purposes of the thesis.

Reading and Understanding Participation in Schools

Originally, when I began the thesis, my second research question was 'What is *inclusion*?' and thus I focused my reading for the study around the concepts of *inclusion* and *exclusion* in education. However, by reflecting on these texts, as well as my *Autobiographical Tales* and the case study of Bowden School, I have now changed the wording of this question to 'What is *participation*?' Nevertheless, the conceptual relationship between *inclusion* and *participation* remains important and I consider both in this section. I begin by examining the use of *inclusion* and *exclusion* in educational discourse and draw on my findings to inform my understanding of the concepts of *participation* and *barriers to participation*. I then discuss why I have chosen to focus on the latter set of concepts and, in particular, its appropriateness in relationship to the concept of school cultures. I end by providing a summary of the principal elements of participation in schools.

Choosing /changing terms and concepts

The use of *participation* in education has to some extent evolved from that of *inclusion* which, in turn, has emerged from an historical/cultural context in which it is associated with issues of *special education* and *integration*. For some who work in schools and write about education, these shifts of language highlight developments in their conceptual understandings. For others,

however, new terms may be adopted but then applied to existing and often deeply held beliefs about the nature of teaching, learning and education. Booth (1998) suggests that the term *inclusive education* is used by some educationalists, both in schools and university departments, simply to reproduce “the traditional notions of special education under a new name” (p.52). That is, the label has changed but conceptual understandings remain the same. He also points out an important limitation in forming boundaries around “areas of study” such as “inclusion”, in that by doing so a wider perspective on education is ignored.

“Users of the term ‘inclusive education’ are no less prey to attempts to assimilate categorised students into an unreconstructed ‘normality’ as users of the term ‘integration’ or ‘mainstreaming’. Further they may not resist the professional temptations to define a ‘new’ area of study, disconnected from the history of education within their cultures. Thus in England, proponents of ‘inclusive’ education rarely make links with the development of ‘comprehensive education’.” (op cit., p.52)

For others again, changes in terminology may be a reflection of conceptual confusions, misunderstandings and inconsistencies. For example, Ware (1995) begins a chapter with the following sentence in which there seems to be a lack of distinction between the terms “*inclusive education*” and “*special education*” as well as the notion of *integration*.

“Inclusive education is an umbrella term used in the United States to describe the restructuring of special education to permit all or most students to be integrated in mainstream classes.” (p.127, my emphases)

In the analysis of my reading about *inclusion* and *participation*, as well as other associated concepts, I have endeavoured to scrutinise the meanings that writers attach to particular terms as well as consider the actual vocabulary they used. Nevertheless, this is not just a matter of semantics. I also acknowledge the power that particular words have to shape our

understandings. Corbett's (1995) attack on the discourse of *special education* is an important reminder of the damage caused through the indiscriminate use of discriminatory language. It is worth recollecting that categories such as "*imbecile*", "*cripple*", "*defective*" and "*idiot*" were still used to define children and young people within the English legislative system throughout the first half of the twentieth century (DES, 1978).

Reading and understanding inclusion

Even when writers ascribe specific conceptual interpretations to terms, they may not be shared by others: different perspectives produce different meanings. It is necessary to take into account the historical and cultural contexts in which concepts such as *inclusion* are used. For example, from Kilpatrick's (1999) perspective, a major barrier to developing more 'inclusive' school communities is "*the existence of two separate school sectors – divided according to religion*" (p.1). This statement, however, is a reflection of how her understanding of inclusion has been shaped by the context of Northern Ireland. Meanwhile, in the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000), inclusion is concerned with increasing globally the number of children who have access to basic education. Approximately twenty-one per cent of all primary aged children, or a total of 130 million, do not attend any form of school (UNICEF, 1998).

In the UK the term *inclusion* is sometimes used more or less synonymously with that of *integration*, although this latter term is also open to a variety of interpretations. At its most straightforward integration requires that a student from a 'special' school is given access to a mainstream school for part or all of his/her education. In practice, however, integration can take many forms. It

may be merely locational and/or social or it may also include partial or full access to a school's academic curriculum. It may involve a student attending a neighbourhood school or it may be another mainstream school outside of his/her local communities. This move towards greater integration has developed out of an increasing dissatisfaction amongst some educationalists about the appropriateness of providing segregated education for some children and young people in 'special' schools. Arguments for integration have been concerned with both philosophical notions of equality of rights as well as practical considerations about the efficiency of running two parallel school systems (Swann, 1985; Dessent, 1987; Sebba and Ainscow, 1996; Thomas *et al*, 1998).

For some writers, therefore, the term *inclusion* is used simply to describe the act of physically *including* students, designated as having 'special educational needs', in mainstream schools. For example, in the document, *Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs* (DfEE, 1997b), the government outlines six themes, one of which is, "*the inclusion of children with SEN within mainstream schooling*" (p.5). Here the concept of inclusion is concerned with a minority of students who are perceived as having particular learning difficulties which, in the past, may have resulted in them attending 'special' schools. In such texts the connection between *inclusion* and *special education* remains strong.

Other educationalists use the term *inclusion* not because they perceive it as being similar to *integration* but to signify a different approach to teaching and learning based on a social interactive model with a wider, whole-school perspective. These contrasting positions are made distinct by Booth *et al*, (2000):

"Inclusion is sometimes seen as primarily involving the movement of students from outside to inside mainstream schools, with the implication that they are 'included' once they are there. However, in our view it is a set of never-ending processes. It involves the specification of the direction of change. It is relevant to any school however inclusive or exclusive its current cultures, policies and practices. It requires schools to engage in a critical examination of what can be done to increase the learning and participation of the diversity of students within the school and its locality." (p.12)

The writers emphasise that inclusion is "*a set of never-ending processes*" by which a school strives to increase the participation of its members, rather than a fixed *state* that can be reached. Emmanuelsson (1998) argues that it is about working towards an unachievable goal in which "*there will always be new territories to conquer*" (p.172).

Reading and understanding exclusion

As with the concepts of *special education*, *integration* and *inclusion*, the educational meanings associated with the concept of *exclusion* have a particular historical and cultural context within the UK. In the Education Act (Number 2) of 1986 the government introduced the term to describe the removal of a student from school either temporarily or permanently for disciplinary reasons. This replaced the use of both *suspension* and *expulsion*. Until recently, many academics have also confined their usage of the word to this specific technical sense (Stirling, 1992; Parsons, 1996; Blyth and Milner, 1997; Hayden, 1997).

Implicit in the title of Hayden's book, *Children Excluded from Primary School*, for example, is the notion that a student is either *included in* or *excluded from* a school. The emphasis, then, is on their physical presence or absence. This

parallels the notion of *integration/inclusion* as being concerned with a student being placed in a mainstream or in a 'special' school. This understanding of *exclusion* has received particular attention throughout the 1990s, as official figures for the number of students excluded from schools for disciplinary reasons have increased (Parsons, *op cit.*). Coverage has been widespread not only in academic texts but also in the media. There has also been concern about the over-representation of certain groups of students in these figures (DfEE, 1999b). For example, Blyth and Milner (*op cit.*) highlight the disproportionate number of Afro-Caribbean young people excluded from school and in particular teenage boys. Stirling (*op cit.*), meanwhile, has focused on the high number of 'looked after' children and young people who are removed from schools.

Nevertheless, there has also been a shift in educational writings towards a conceptualisation of *exclusion* as being wider than the official removal of students from a school for disciplinary reasons. Sebba and Ainscow (1996), for example, describe:

"The more subtle or hidden processes of discrimination related to factors such as socio-economic circumstances, gender or race." (p.8)

Booth (1997) highlights some of the different ways in which a student may be unofficially kept out of school. He describes such processes as "*exclusion by default – active and passive*" (p.32). By this he means those students who are excluded because schools have not actively sought to include them. He provides a number of examples such as traveller children, truants, pregnant schoolgirls and school aged mothers, as well as those who attend a 'special' school rather than their local mainstream school.

Booth (*op cit.*) describes how students may also be physically included in a school but excluded from the activities taking place both socially and/or in terms of the curriculum: for example, where the curriculum is not adapted to take account of students who speak English as an additional language. He then broadens further his conceptualisation of exclusion by highlighting its connection with inclusion and the processes that support the *participation* of students. He offers this definition:

"The process of decreasing the participation of pupils in the cultures and curricula of mainstream school... Exclusion affects all pupils who are devalued by, and in, mainstream school." (p.35)

Similarly, outside of education, the concept of exclusion has also been given a broader application: that of being excluded from society. For example, the government set up the Social Exclusion Unit in 1997 for the purpose of scrutinising poverty, housing, unemployment, as well as education. In his book, *Geographies of Exclusion*, Sibley (1995) also explores how exclusion may be considered in a wider social context. He examines how individuals and groups of people are excluded by others, and exclude themselves, from social spaces, both literally and metaphorically.

Drawing on the concepts of inclusion and exclusion to understand participation and barriers to participation

By drawing on my reading, as discussed so far in this section, I have been able to identify key elements of the concepts of *inclusion* and *exclusion* which have provided a foundation for my understanding of the concepts of *participation* and *barriers to participation*. Indeed, in the two sections above, I have already referred to texts in which writers choose to use a combination of these sets of

concepts (for example, Booth *et al*, 2000 and Booth, 1997). A summary of my findings are given in Figure 3:3.

Figure 3:3 Key conceptual links between inclusion / exclusion and participation / barriers to participation

- Impact upon all members of a school
- Impact upon all aspects of school life
- Never-ending and interconnected processes
- Concerned with responses to diversity

Impact upon all members of a school: Both sets of concepts are concerned with the experiences of all members of a school: staff and parents/carers, as well as students. They do not, therefore, only apply to a specific group, or groups, of students categorised as having 'special educational needs'. Indeed, using this term to describe students may act as a barrier to their participation.

Impact upon all aspects of school life: Both sets of concepts are also concerned with *all* aspects of the life of a school and not just the teaching and learning which occur in classrooms, although this too is important. They relate to a school's formal policies and practices as well as the countless everyday interactions that take place between its members.

Never-ending and interconnected processes: Both *inclusion* and *exclusion* and *participation* and *barriers to participation* are never-ending processes (Ballard, 1995). They are constantly shifting but often difficult to change. There can be no such institution as an 'inclusive school' and likewise no 'fully participatory' one. Both pairs of processes are closely connected: increasing participation (inclusion) reduces barriers to participation (exclusion) and vice

versa. However, these processes are not always easy to identify. They can be complex, ambiguous and opaque. Activities in a school may increase participation (inclusion) for some whilst reinforcing barriers to participation (exclusion) for others. For example, whilst inviting all staff to meetings encourages wider participation in a school's decision making processes, it may be for newly qualified teachers and non-teaching staff that the formal setting of full staff meetings acts as a barrier to their participation.

Concerned with responses to diversity: Both *participation* and *inclusion* are concerned with responses to *diversity* within a school. In some studies diversity is primarily concerned with student ethnicity (Riehl, 2000), although Pohan and Aguilar (2001) for example, incorporate “*social class, gender, religion, languages (other than English), and sexual orientation*” (p161). Others extend its meaning by including disability (for example, Oliver, 1990 and Thomas *et al*, 1998). However, the devaluation of any member of a school, for whatever reason, is a barrier to their participation and therefore also exclusionary. This may be identified within a school's formal policies, its classroom practices as well as in the everyday attitudes and acts of intolerance and discrimination that take place. Clark, *et al* (1999) make reference to what they call the “*commonality-difference dilemma*” (p.171). They argue that if staff respond to students' diversity they “*ipso facto create different forms of provision for different students and thus become less than fully inclusive*”. Yet, if they ignore students' diversity they may exclude them from participation by “*offering them experiences from which they [are] alienated*” (p.172). However, this is misguided and is based on an assimilationist view of education. Participatory learning does not require that all students receive identical experiences but rather than the diversity of students is not only recognised

but also used “as a rich resource to support the learning of all” (Booth, et al, 2000, p.12).

Reading and understanding participation

Nevertheless, despite similarities between these two sets of concepts I have chosen to use the terms *participation* and *barriers to participation* in the thesis rather than *inclusion* and *exclusion*. There are a number of reasons for this decision and to illustrate some of them I draw on the following definition by Booth (2002, in press).

“Participation in education concerns staff as well as students. For students, it implies learning alongside others and collaborating with them in shared lessons. It involves active engagement with what is learnt and taught, and having a say in how education is experienced. But participation also involves being recognised for oneself and being accepted for oneself. I participate with you, when you recognise me as a person like yourself, and accept me for who I am.”

Arguably much of this statement could be covered by the term *inclusion*, nevertheless it represents a shift of emphasis which is central to the thesis.

Participation is distanced conceptually from notions of ‘special educational needs’: However well we define a word, the ways in which it is understood by others is also partly determined by how they choose to use it themselves. This is not just a matter of word play. The concepts of *inclusion* and *exclusion* continue to be shaped by past interpretations and in particular their association with the notion of the physical presence and absence of students in mainstream schools. Even in some texts which set out to argue for a wider whole-school interpretation of inclusion, there remains an enduring focus on specific groups of students who are considered to have learning difficulties (Sebba, 1997; Thomas et al, 1998; Corbett, 1999). The concepts of

participation and *barriers to participation* do not carry this burden of the past and in particular they are distanced from the notion of 'special educational needs'. Although they are concerned with access to and within schools, this is only one aspect of a much broader understanding of schools and education. In the quotation by Booth (*op cit.*), its emphasis is not on physical access to schools but on students and staff participating in activities so that they have access to other members, both inside and outside classrooms. This perspective equates closely to the conceptual underpinnings of the thesis.

Participation is about actively 'joining in': *Inclusion* may suggest a passivity on the part of members of a school, whereas *participation* stresses the notion of members actively 'joining in' together. With the former, therefore, there is a sense of the conditional: members are allowed, maybe even perhaps encouraged, by others to be included. For the latter, participation is a right that is shared by all. However, this in turn also implies reciprocal responsibilities. In Booth's definition, for example, there is a right and a responsibility to participate in learning alongside and with others, as well as a right and a responsibility to participate in decision-making processes.

Relationships based on mutual recognition and acceptance: There are useful parallels between Fielding's (1998; 1999; 2000) understanding of the nature of "*schools as communities*" and the concepts of participation and barriers to participation. Fielding draws on the work of the philosopher Macmurray who argues that relationships should be based on two fundamental principles: freedom and equality. Macmurray (1950) states:

"If we do not treat one another as equals, we exclude freedom from the relationship. Freedom too, conditions equality. For if there is restraint between us there is fear; and to counter the fear we must seek control over its object, and attempt to subordinate the other person to our own

power. Any attempt to achieve freedom without equality, or to achieve equality without freedom, must, therefore be self-defeating". (p.74)

This emphasis on "freedom" and "equality" also relates to rights and responsibilities. Members have the right to be themselves whilst accepting the responsibility that they must value other members as their equals. Fielding stresses that this applies to all relationships in schools: between students and staff as well as those amongst students and amongst staff. However, Macmurray does not argue for equality from an assimilationist's point of view:

"It is precisely the recognition of difference and variety amongst individuals that gives meaning to the assertion of equality." (1938, p.4)

There are clear parallels here between this and Booth's definition of participation, in which he stresses the mutuality of participatory relationships in which diversity is acknowledged:

"I participate with you, when you recognise me as a person like yourself, and accept me for who I am." (op cit.)

Learning is active and collaborative for all members: Booth also describes participation as involving the active and collaborative learning of students, in which they make choices about what they learn as well as how they work together to support each other's learning (Hopkins and Black-Hawkins, 1995). This is not, therefore, about 'special' provision for 'special' students who are considered to have learning difficulties. To paraphrase the title of Hart's (1996) book, it is about the enhancement of all students' learning "*through innovative thinking*", that is, using available resources, including students and other staff, in creative ways. This understanding of participatory learning can also be extended beyond the definition given by Booth to include members of staff participating in active and collaborative learning with their colleagues and therefore working towards what Southworth (1994) terms a "*learning school*".

Indeed, the contribution of all teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as students and parents/carers, should be recognised and differences acknowledged, encouraged and welcomed because they provide a range of experiences, understanding and interests that make up the membership of a school.

A summary of the principal elements of the concepts of participation and barriers to participation

Figure 3:4 provides a summary of the principal elements of the concepts of participation and barriers to participation that have arisen through the reading that I have undertaken as part of the study. It is an extension of Figure 3:3, which draws on my understanding of the linked set of concepts of *inclusion* and *exclusion*. However, it goes beyond this by including the key points from the discussion above.

Figure 3:4 Understanding participation and barriers to participation

- Impact upon all members of a school
- Impact upon all aspects of school life
- Never-ending and interconnected processes
- Concerned with responses to diversity
- Distanced conceptually from notions of 'special educational needs'
- Concerned with the active right of members to 'join in'
- Relationships based on mutual recognition and acceptance
- Learning is active and collaborative for all members

Some Reflections on Reading and Understanding

In this chapter I have set out my understanding of the key concepts of the thesis by drawing on the writings of others. I have focused particularly on addressing my first two research questions, '*What are school cultures?*' and '*What is participation?*' It is in the subsequent chapters, the *Autobiographical Tales* and the case study of Bowden School, in which I bring together these concepts to begin to address the third research question, '*To what extent can the concept of school cultures contribute to the understanding and development of participation in schools?*' However, links between them have already been formed through the writing of this chapter. To return to the opening quotation by Manguel, my reading and the thinking it has stimulated, has allowed me "*to begin to understand*" not only the key concepts of the thesis but also the relationship between them. This has happened in two ways. First, I have read texts in which writers have also considered the relationship between school cultures and participation. Second, during the course of constructing this chapter my own thinking about the significance of the concept of school cultures in understanding participation has developed. Both means have informed the thesis as a whole.

Some writers express an explicit interest in these relationships: for example, a paper by Carrington (1999) is entitled, "*Inclusion needs a different school culture*". Also, the *Index of Inclusion* (Booth *et al*, 2000), to which I have frequently referred throughout this chapter, focuses specifically on the interactions between a school's "*policies, practices and cultures*" as a way of understanding participation. For other writers their interest in these relationships is more implicit but not necessarily less credible. For example, in Ball's (1981) ethnographic study of Beachside Comprehensive, he reveals much about the cultures of this school and in doing so highlights how its

members are at times excluded from full participation. More recently, and as discussed already in this chapter, Fielding's work (1998, 1999, 2000), on schools as communities, covers similar territories.

Finally, whilst reading, writing and thinking about this chapter I have, inevitably, made my own links between the key concepts of the study. For example, by examining cultures in terms of their boundaries I have been led to consider what it might mean to be inside or outside of those boundaries, that is to participate, or not to participate, in those cultures. Participation is also about belonging and this is partly determined by how members of a school identify themselves and how they are identified by others. I have also been made aware of how both school cultures and processes of participation are formed by their pasts, present and possible futures and in this way they impact upon each other. They are not only persistent and therefore difficult to modify, but also shifting and therefore open to the possibilities of change. Similarly the concepts of 'normal' and 'other', whilst helpful in exploring behaviours which shape and are shaped by school cultures, can not ignore the whole background to the language and ideology of 'special educational needs' which is premised on the idea that being 'special' equates with being 'different' and 'abnormal'.

The thread that ties together the two concepts of school cultures and participation is the values and beliefs held by members of a school. These permeate its cultures and help to determine who does and does not participate, in what ways and how. Values and beliefs shape responses to diversity and are demonstrations of the relative worth and worthlessness ascribed to members of a school. They also impact upon the nature of relationships formed both inside and outside of classrooms and between staff

and students, amongst staff and amongst students. Therefore to develop either the cultures of a school, or the processes of participation within it, requires that both are modified and this can not happen without examining the deeply held values and beliefs of its members.

CHAPTER FOUR

INCLUDING MYSELF: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TALES

“Autobiographies have the potential to provide an insider view of people’s real lives; to give us an holistic view of people; to provide a counterbalance to other views; and to form the basis of a political document for understanding and change.”
(Atkinson, 1997, p.21)

The purpose of Chapter Four is to reflect upon my own experiences of schools and education and in doing so begin to address the final research question, *“To what extent can the concept of school cultures contribute to the understanding and development of participation in schools?”* The chapter is in four main sections, each of which corresponds to a stage in my autobiography. Together they explore further the central concepts of the thesis by drawing upon the theoretical framework developed through my reading in the previous chapter.

Atkinson, in the quotation which starts this chapter, highlights the potential power of autobiographical writings and it is my intention to exploit these strengths. As the subject of my tales I offer an *“insider”* perspective of a *“real”* life. By incorporating the wider worlds of families and friends, as well as local and national influences, I set out to provide an *“holistic”* view of the relationship between the cultures of a school and its members. My analysis of the tales, through highlighting ambiguities and contradictions, gives a *“counterbalance”* to existing understandings. And finally, the purpose of the thesis as a whole is to contribute towards *“understanding and change”* so that educational policies and practices may be developed. This chapter is one part of that overall aim.

Being a Student at School

Even before writing about being at school as a child and young person I would have readily agreed that family life has an impact on a student's participation and learning. I do not simply mean social background, class and poverty/wealth, although these are important, but also the emotional lives of children as members of their families. However, by remembering my own childhood I have understood this in a qualitatively different way. In this first set of autobiographical tales I explore the connections and collisions between home and school cultures. I describe this as being like the presence of 'ghosts' in the classroom, brought from home into school every day, unseen but always there.

These tales also examine the impact of local and national politics on the cultures of schools. As a 'grammar school girl' my knowledge and understanding of school life were partly a product of government legislation, which in turn shaped, and was shaped by, local and national cultures. My education, from the age of four, took place within a system that was rigidly selective by attainment. Like the majority of my peers, their parents and our teachers, I accepted the categorisation of students according to age, gender, class and notions of 'attainment'. My sense of identity and belonging, as well as *not* belonging, were partly formed by these divisions. They also helped to determine how I identified others.

Moving from 'B' to 'A' at primary school

In 1962, shortly before my fifth birthday, I started at the local primary school. In terms of pupil numbers it was large: there were four classes in each year group, and my school reports show that there were between forty-two and

forty-eight in my class. The school was streamed into 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'R'. It was not until I was a teacher that I realised that the latter probably stood for 'remedial': as children we thought it meant 'rubbish'. In the reception year, placement in a stream was decided according to the term in which a child's birthday fell. The 'A' class had autumn term birthdays; the 'B' class, spring and the 'C' class, summer. I do not know how 'R' children were chosen, although a casual observer might have thought it was determined by the lack of a full school uniform. During that first year of school children were sorted, selected and shifted up and down the streams according to notions of 'ability'.

Since I was born in February I was duly placed in the 'B' stream but by half-term my mother had visited the school, wanting to know why, since I could already read, I had not been placed in the 'A' class. She knew the system, having already sent an August and an October born child into it. I was promoted and stayed in 'A' classes from then on. After that first year there was, I think, little movement between streams; I do not remember other children being moved into or out of our class. Some nine years later, when my younger sister started at the school, my mother was appalled that the new headteacher had introduced mixed attainment classes. She approved of the old system, just as long as *her* children were in the 'A' stream.

Throughout my time at primary school, I was aware of advantages of being in the top class. We were considered to be able and therefore were generally more confident of our abilities. We were given additional responsibilities and opportunities. I was particularly proud to wear the badge for 'special monitor': my duties being to run errands for the headteacher. One year I was chosen to be the school's Rose Queen. I sang in the choir, acted in school plays and won various in-school competitions for poetry, history and handwriting. I do not

remember children from other streams being given the opportunity to participate in these activities. I also acquiesced in the belief that 'A' classes had the 'best' teachers because we were the 'best' children. I never considered how those in other classes might feel about their position in the school since I had no association with them whatsoever. Playtimes were as exclusively streamed by the children as lessons were by the staff.

Interactions between home and school cultures

Although my position in this hierarchy was secure I was constantly on guard. It was not enough to do well. I wanted to get the best marks, to try harder than anyone else and for my teacher to praise me most often. From the age of seven we sat annual exams in English and arithmetic with our class position being recorded on our school reports. My first experience of this was humiliating: I was placed seventh out of forty-two. I had assumed that I would come first and was devastated when I did not. I thought I was somehow to blame and I recall being anxious that my class teacher would no longer like me. Why on earth should a child worry like this? I do remember being distressed when my father read the report and asked what was so special about the other six children that their work was better than mine. It is difficult now, as it was for me at the time, to separate my school experiences from those of my home. My need to please both my father and my teachers was overwhelming. All children bring aspects of their family life to school with them each day. Classrooms and playgrounds are haunted by the presence of these ghostly figures, unseen by staff but exerting their influence over everyone.

My father was hard to please and ill tempered. Whenever he was in the house we children tried to be quiet, but any sense of calm belied the underlying tension of not knowing what might happen next. His bouts of verbal anger could erupt unpredictably into violence. He appeared to value education highly, talking with bitterness about the school he had attended as a country boy where he was taught by the vicar's unqualified daughter. For this single class school of five to fourteen year olds it seemed she only had one year's worth of lessons. She regurgitated these annually to all the children, so by the time my father left he had regularly repeated the same pieces of work. Many of his school days were spent digging the vicar's garden, chopping his wood and picking fruit for his jam. Educational progress was slow. Like many of his generation, fighting in the Second World War offered my father the opportunity to widen his personal world. He saw that others had had a better education and he grasped any chance to 'improve' himself.

The effect of all this on myself and my sisters and brother was/is tangled. Certainly, my father wanted us to have the chances in life that he perceived himself as never having had. However, the forces behind these strong feelings were complicated. It was, I think, his way of putting right the inequity of his experiences; of somehow punishing those who had been more privileged than he. My father did not engender in me a sense of good fortune but rather an overwhelming feeling of guilt. I do not remember him enjoying my education and taking pride in my achievements. If, for example, I came seventh out of forty-two he felt that I was not trying hard enough. If I did much better, his mounting jealousy could quickly erupt into anger. There was little delight in all this.

And what part did my mother play? To me, as a child, she seemed always to be exhausted. She washed, cooked, cleaned, shopped and fitted in a string of poorly paid, part-time jobs: working in a bakery or serving in a pub. However much effort she made there was never quite enough housekeeping money to go round. I see her in my childhood memory lighting the fire in the morning, her hands cold as she strikes the match; or in the garden pulling steaming clothes through the icy mangle. There were rows over money. There were rows over the children. To my father we were messy, untidy, difficult and rude. One of her roles was to protect us from him. Another was to protect him from us.

Being prepared for grammar school

For my last two years at primary school I was taught by Mr Richards. I adored him without reservation and constructed elaborate fantasies in which I became an orphan and he would adopt me. He was a gifted teacher and perhaps his greatest skill was making every child in his class feel special. Even now I hope that this is not really so. I still want to think that he did favour me. Looking back as an adult, I can see that he fulfilled the role of the 'good father' figure. As with all my previous teachers, I worked hard to please him. However, through him I began to understand the delight of learning for learning's sake. I also discovered how books, and the knowledge and ideas contained within them, could provide a respite of sorts from unhappiness elsewhere in my life.

An important aspect of being an 'A' student was being thoroughly prepared for the 11-plus examination in the final year of primary school. I sat mine in 1968 knowing, somehow, that my future depended upon its results. About twenty per cent of children in the area where I lived passed. These children went on to the girls' and boys' grammar schools where they pursued a strictly academic

education until they were eighteen years old with many then going on to higher education. The other eighty per cent of students - that is the vast majority - who failed this exam, went to the co-educational secondary modern school. Most of them left at age fifteen with no formal qualifications. In my year no one from classes 'B', 'C' or 'R' gained places at the grammar schools. It was as simple as that. However, being an 'A' student, I was expected to pass and I did.

Further interactions between home and school cultures

My experiences of being a student at this new school were not as straightforward as gaining admission to it. For the first time on a regular basis I was taken out of my home environment. To travel from my house, the secondary modern school would have been a quick walk through south London suburban streets; the grammar school entailed a bus ride to a leafy Surrey village. It was a different world and one which I was thrilled to join. I longed to be a part of this school, with its beautiful grounds, science laboratories, huge library and grown-up girls. And yet, somehow I did not fit in. At my primary school I had been encouraged by Mr Richards to challenge his ideas and I had responded enthusiastically. This was my solace from home, where I could lose myself in learning and where adults were generally kind and admiring.

At this new school I was reprimanded for being over-familiar and impertinent. I was constantly in trouble. School reports suggest that my work, at least to begin with, was acceptable; however, as a person, I felt I wasn't. I realise now that going to a grammar school was not the same as belonging there. I did not feel understood or welcomed. It was like trying to join in a game I had never

practised and for which I did not know the rules. By the time I began to know what was expected of me I was no longer willing to play. I was aware for the first time that my home and family were unlike others: that having a car, a telephone, holidays, a mother who did not work, or one who only worked because she chose to, were considered commonplace by staff and students. "Describe your favourite holiday place," the English teacher would say. "If you want to help with the play tonight you may use the school phone to tell your mother where you are." "Ask your father to pick you up from the netball match."

Some years after leaving school the mother of one of my closest friends told me about the first parents' evening she had attended. I was in the same class as her daughter and we had been at the school for less than a term. Our tutor advised the mother not to encourage her child to be friendly with me, as she perceived me to be a 'bad influence'. When asked for clarification, the teacher explained that I was not the 'right sort'. I was lucky that my friend's mother ignored this advice. However, I also remember her father, when driving me home one evening, suddenly asking me whether I lived in a council house. Aged eleven, I did not know what the term meant but I could tell from the question that the best answer would be 'No'. He certainly seemed relieved when I said this.

Moving away

Whilst feeling excluded from the prevalent middle-class culture of the school, my experiences there also began to separate me from my family. As a teenager I was no longer sure where I did belong. For example, I wanted to go to university. I had no idea what this really meant, but I saw it as not only an

opportunity to leave home but also to get paid for reading books. However, because I had a part-time job the school were unwilling to help me to apply. My teachers argued that working in a shop showed a lack of commitment to my studies, whilst at home I was expected to earn money if I wanted to stay on at school. As a truculent teenager I began to truant, dropping out of lessons and thus fulfilling the expectations of my teachers. I then realised that I was not really helping myself. Still truculent, and still truanting, I decided to study for my A' Level exams in the local library rather than bothering with school. In time I was the first member of my family to go to university. Finally it seemed my teachers and my family had something in common: they both were rather more bewildered than pleased by this turn of events.

Starting my Career as a Teacher

This section draws on my early teaching experiences as a supply teacher at three very different schools. I consider what these reveal about the nature of the relationships formed within the institutional structures of a school. I highlight the role of gender, ethnicity and power in shaping these relationships: how students and staff are identified by others in the school and how they identify themselves. I became a teacher partly because I wanted to support students for whom being at school was not always a happy experience. However, I was forced to realise that as an individual teacher, particularly a young and inexperienced one, the quality of the relationships I formed with students was largely shaped by the existing cultures of the school. The connection between selection and disaffection emphasises how some individuals and groups are devalued at the expense of others. These

tales also examine the nature of relationships amongst staff and how power and status act as barriers to participatory relationships.

Choosing to teach

I left university in 1978 with a degree in English and little idea of what to do next. Some of my peer group started teacher-training courses but I had no intention of becoming like the members of staff from my grammar school. It did not occur to me that they were hardly representative of most teachers. During that first year after university, however, I listened to friends' stories of teaching practice in which they encountered children and young people whom they described as naughty, rude and difficult. They also complained that some students were barely literate. They spoke of them in tones of pity, exasperation and sometimes animosity although rarely with sympathy or affection.

These students intrigued and bothered me, especially the sullen and insolent teenagers whom I recognised as being something like myself from only a few years previously. I wanted nothing to do with teaching English as an academic subject so I decided to work with secondary aged students who were perceived as failing at school. At that time there was no postgraduate certificate of education specifically for 'remedial' teaching or 'special educational needs'. The nearest I could find was a course on 'middle years' teaching which covered basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Supply teaching at a girls' secondary school

My teaching career started in a rather haphazard way. Having recently married I found myself constrained to finding a job in a particular

geographical area. Whilst waiting for a vacancy in what was then called the 'remedial' department of schools, I joined the local education authority's supply list as an English teacher hoping to get some secondary school experience as well as earn some money. My first job, for about three weeks only, was in a girls' comprehensive school. I don't remember much about the students except that their conversations seemed to be dominated by the topic of boys. The members of staff were virtually all female and this seemed uncomfortably reminiscent of my own experiences of grammar school.

I do recall a particular incident. I was standing at one end of a corridor and a deputy headteacher was at the other. She screamed at me to stop where I was and wait for her. To my surprise she then demanded to be told why I was wearing red tights. I was at a loss for words. I said something like, "Because I like them," which from her response was clearly not the answer she had been expecting. Eventually she and I both realised that she had mistaken me for a sixth form student. I was wearing a navy blue jumper and skirt, which were similar to their uniform, although red tights were not. She smiled and apologised. Her fury dissipated as if merely an act. However, I was shaken by the nastiness of her attack and wondered what drove a person to shout at and humiliate another in this way.

Being female in an all boys' school

My next supply job was in a boys' school, nominally a comprehensive but with a skewed intake because of the presence of grammar schools close by. Despite this, in each year group, students were arranged for English lessons, into five sets based on notions of ability. When I arrived two teachers from the department had been absent because of long-term illness. In response to this

their classes from the top three sets had been shared out amongst other members of the department. A new timetable was then created for a supply teacher. It was formed entirely from the bottom two sets and comprised only students in years nine, ten and eleven. I started in mid-October and was the fifth person since the start of the school year to take this post. To begin with I had not really understood why the department had made these arrangements as I did not know what a 'set' was, however it soon became clear.

This job was my first experience of teaching in a school that was culturally diverse. The majority of the students were white but those I taught were not. In these bottom set classes there was a disproportionate number of Asian, Afro-Caribbean, Hispanic and Cypriot students. The links between setting, disaffection and ethnicity now seem obvious to me as I look back with horror at a system that had such clear racial ramifications. I was twenty-three years old and I had never taught a teenage boy in my life. There was one other female teacher on the staff, close to retirement. If the girls at my previous school were obsessed with the opposite sex it was nothing compared to what I now encountered. Groups of boys would rush at break times to gather under the open plan staircase in an attempt to catch a glimpse of what was under my skirt. Sexual comments were shouted at me and obscene drawings were scattered over the blackboard in my teaching room. I never asked for help in dealing with these matters as I did not feel able to talk to a male member of staff about them. Many of the students in my classes were verbally aggressive towards me. They did not appear to care about their work, nor did they seem to expect me to either. They were well aware that working hard to achieve nothing more than a negligible grade at Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examination was a waste of time.

Hanging on

On my first morning a burly student stood very close to me and said something like, 'Well, hello miss, and goodbye'. There was a dramatic pause, then he pushed his face as near to me as he could and explained that he was saying goodbye because he did not expect to see me again. He added ominously that the previous supply teacher had only lasted one morning. I was intimidated by this exchange, angry and confused. It was a revelation to me of what it must be like to be in a bottom set when I thought about it later. I could not understand why those students who were perceived as needing the most help had been given the teacher with the least experience. At last I had an opportunity to work with students whom other teachers did not want: unfortunately I was no longer sure that I did anymore. I would like to claim that I stayed at the school for the sake of the students but it was really because I needed to earn a living. I did try to teach my classes as best I could but was ill equipped for the job.

Staff and student relationships

My relationships with the staff were as alarming as those with the students. Nobody from the English department asked about my lessons or even just enquired how I was doing. The staff room was a cliché. Certain people sat in certain chairs and as a young woman I was made to feel as out of place as if I had intruded into a gentleman's club in St James's, London. I asked a deputy headteacher for advice about students who refused to work in my lessons. He looked perplexed and asked what the boys had done. I explained that it was not so much what they had done but rather what they had *not* done. To my consternation he inquired if any of the students had ever thrown a chair at me. When I replied 'No' he seemed relieved and said I should come back and

talk to him if that ever happened. I was then dismissed from his office. Strangely enough I found this exchange quite comforting. Things could clearly be worse.

I stayed for five weeks, only leaving when one of the absent English teachers returned. In that time I discovered the difference between teaching and learning: I taught a lot and my students learnt very little. I made some progress: my lessons were less rowdy, the students had mainly stopped swearing *at* me and there were fewer obscene drawings on the blackboard. Maybe they just got bored with trying to annoy me. What I did not manage with any of the students was to form supportive relationships by appreciating them as individual people. I was too busy just surviving. When I later read *The Roaring Boys* (Blishen, 1955), despite the many years which separated our experiences, I recognised myself. Like him, I could only hope to improve.

Another school: another world

My next supply job was some five miles from the boys' school, but it seemed like another world. Hartbrook School was originally a charitable foundation, established in the seventeenth century, to provide education for poor boys in the East End of London. In time it became a boys' grammar school run by the Inner London Education Authority although still maintaining its voluntary aided status. During the 1970s and 1980s all state secondary schools in London became comprehensives. The governors of Hartbrook School decided that the original site was not large enough to accommodate the changes required. The foundation moved to an urban location in one of the shire counties to become a mixed comprehensive for eleven to eighteen-year olds. When I arrived in 1980 there were only four year groups in the new school

whilst in London just years eleven, twelve and thirteen remained. As one establishment increased in numbers, the other was gradually run down.

At first, after my experiences of the boys' school, I found this job a joy. I only taught years seven, eight and nine. The students were generally delightful, courteous and keen. This new, well-equipped school, with its extensive grounds, had a feeling of excitement about it. Student numbers were still relatively small and it seemed easy to get to know everyone: staff and students. I developed a number of close friendships with colleagues that still continue today. I also found I was able to concentrate on teaching and developing relationships with the students rather than just classroom control. I enjoyed my work and, to begin with, I felt lucky to have a job where I could get on with the business of teaching.

Establishing Myself at Hartbrook School

After completing my supply work I was offered a two-term contract as an English teacher and when it ended I was asked to stay on permanently. My understanding of Hartbrook School modified during the five years I worked there. As I became more competent and confident as a teacher I increasingly enjoyed my classroom experiences with students. However, I also became more and more disillusioned with the values and beliefs held by those who had the power to determine policies and practices in the school. I was particularly concerned about the divisive arrangement of organising all students into two bands based on academic attainment. Although the school was nominally a comprehensive its predominant ideology continued to support the notion that students could, and should, be divided into two groups based on the

grammar/secondary school divide. The intransigence of these cultural values highlights the difficulties in changing institutional cultures and the fear and anger when change is suggested.

My experiences at Hartbrook School also caused me to consider how a school is part of a wider local educational community and the ways in which the activities of one school impact upon the educational experiences of students at another. The exclusivity and insularity of this school created a barrier to the participation not only of its own members but also members of other local schools. Most dramatically, the opening of Hartbrook contributed to the closure of a nearby secondary school.

An old boys' school

The majority of senior staff at Hartbrook School were male who had been originally appointed to work in the old school in London, although they now spread their time between the two sites. Many of the appointments to the new school were younger and included more women. Despite this, the predominant values remained those of a boys' grammar school. Gender distinctions were pronounced. Female students were taught cookery and needlework whilst male students learnt metalwork and woodwork. There were two deputy headteachers: the female deputy dealt with girls' problems and problem girls and the male deputy was assigned the same role for boys, which for them included corporal punishment. Most of the heads of department had never taught female students and the majority of them had never taught before in a comprehensive school.

Some of the male staff appeared to enjoy making sexual comments in the staffroom about the physical attractions, or lack of them, of female teachers and students. I remember feeling uncomfortable when I was the target of these remarks but I did not know how I was supposed to deal with them. At the time, I did not recognise this behaviour as sexual harassment and a form of bullying. There was nobody in authority to whom to turn: one of the worse offenders was one of the governors. His unwanted advances were a rite of passage for young female teachers. I do not remember any woman on the staff behaving similarly with regard to the males in the school.

The comprehensive selection of students

The cultures of the erstwhile boys' grammar school also shaped the values and beliefs of the new school in another important way. Selecting and categorising students in terms of notions of attainment dominated the organisational structures of the school. However, the local education authority did not allow schools to select students for admission by means of an examination. To circumvent this constraint prospective parents and students for Hartbrook School were invited to meet the headteacher. This amounted to an interview in which parents/carers were asked what jobs they had and children were questioned about their hobbies. On this basis, and with the scope that being a Voluntary Aided school allowed, the headteacher chose those whom he hoped would be suitable students. A staffroom joke was that the headteacher's secretary was sent out to note the year of registration and make of prospective parents' cars as supplementary evidence of wealth and class. As for any parent who indicated that their child might benefit from some form of additional support, they were advised by the headteacher to go elsewhere.

Despite the school's best efforts to acquire an 'academic' intake of students they, inevitably, comprised a range of attainments. To accommodate this, students were organised into bands: three 'upper' and two 'middle'. (There were no 'lower' bands.) This arrangement allowed the school to replicate the divide between grammar and secondary modern students and curricula, and the balance towards the former was an indication of the skewed intake of the school. Becoming a comprehensive was not seen as an opportunity to reconsider existing policies and practices or the values and beliefs which underpinned them.

The children came to the school on a Saturday morning in the summer term before they officially started and were given two tests, in English and mathematics. From the results of these they were allocated to a band. The tests were an unofficial form of the 11-plus examination. The banding system was utterly inflexible. There was no mixed attainment: not even for a term, or for a single subject, or even just for form groups. If you were 'upper' band then you were 'upper' for every subject; likewise for the euphemistically labelled 'middle' band. There was some movement between bands once the results of end of year exams were known, but no 'middle' band student could be 'put up' unless an 'upper' band student was 'put down'.

One school, different cultures

On the first day of the school year all one hundred and fifty of the new year seven students were sent to the school hall to meet their form tutors, of which I was one. I would watch their anxious and excited faces as they stood with primary school friends. At this stage they did not know the results of the summer tests and therefore in which band they would be placed. The female

deputy headteacher would read out their names, class by class and always starting with the 'upper' bands. Once a group of thirty was gathered it would leave the hall and the next class would then be assembled. For some students this was a perfectly painless system but for others it was not. Gradually, as the numbers reduced, the remaining children would begin to realise that they were not going to be placed in the 'clever' classes. This indignity was exacerbated further, for some, by being separated from their friends.

As soon as I had been assigned my thirty 'middle' band students I would escort them to their form room. Sometimes one of them would already be crying before we arrived. And then the questions would start. They would ask if they were in an 'upper' band and I would explain that their class was called a 'middle' band. Then I would be asked which classes were 'lower' bands and I would explain that there was none. By the end of their first hour as students at Hartbrook these children had already begun to understand their value in the cultures of the school, regardless of how I tried to disguise it. Throughout our year together this notion of 'banding' would run like an uneasy thread. Parents /carers would ask what they had to do to get their son or daughter promoted. They were also anxious about what difference being in a 'middle' band would make to their learning. The standard school answer to this was to explain that all students covered the same areas of the curriculum but some more slowly than others. Few parents seemed satisfied by the logic of this response.

Meanwhile students in the 'upper' bands had, from the very start, a different experience which was reinforced as they continued their school careers. In year eight they were allowed to take a second foreign language, in years ten and eleven they were entered for O' Level examinations. They were expected to

stay on in the sixth form and a place at university was held before them as their right as long as they worked hard, with Oxbridge being the final achievement for those who deserved it. Some 'middle' band students did manage to get O' and A' Levels as well as university places. However, in doing so they reinforced the belief, within the cultures of the school, that academic achievement was more highly valued than other forms.

In assemblies the headteacher would ask the school to cheer the names of those students who were offered a place at Oxbridge. He never did so for those who worked hard to gain a CSE grade one, let alone a student who started the school as virtually a non-reader but left competently literate. This splitting of students into two bands starkly illustrates how members of the same school can have very different experiences of its cultures. The same beliefs, which reinforced and developed the confidence and self-esteem of 'upper' band students at Hartbrook School, also helped to devalue those who were judged to be 'middle' band students.

Setting up a 'remedial' department

Because I had shown an interest in students who were experiencing some difficulties in their learning, by the end of my first full year at the school I was promoted and given responsibility for 'remedial' provision and I stayed in this job for a further three years. Until then there had been no 'remedial' teachers on the staff. At the time I was flattered, as a teacher with so little experience, to be chosen to start this new department. However, now I suspect that it was less of a compliment to me and more of an indication of how little value was ascribed to such work by the headteacher and his deputies. Nonetheless I threw myself into the role. I began a part time Advanced Diploma in *Children*

with Learning Difficulties to improve my understanding and expertise. I made frequent use of the local education authority's advisory services. I pestered staff to let me visit their lessons to observe how students were learning across the curriculum and although some chose not to, others were extremely supportive. The new department was well funded as the charitable foundation always had money and in time I added to the staffing and resources.

My role was to provide 'extra' English and mathematics in years seven, eight and nine for those students who gained low scores in the quasi 11-plus tests. Because the English 'remedial' sessions were timetabled against French lessons these students never had the opportunity to study a modern language. Once removed from French they could not go back. There were about six or seven students, mainly boys, in each group, all from 'middle' bands. Sometimes a student would make tremendous progress in their first term or so at Hartbrook School but they had to stay with me for the whole three years. Others made little real improvement or if they did its effects did not seem to transfer to other lessons. Learning to use full stops in 'extra' English did not necessarily have an impact on punctuation in, say, history or chemistry classes.

(Modern) languages and ideologies

Learning a modern language seemed to act as a form of benchmark for attainment at Hartbrook School. Not only were so-called 'remedial' students prevented from participating in French lesson but only 'upper' band students were allowed to study a second modern language. As I became more assured about my role in the school I began to discuss the possibility of including all students in French, at least. Some members of the modern languages

department appeared to be outraged by my suggestion, especially since a few of the students I taught were considered to have behaviour difficulties. They were loathed to add to their workload in this way and did not believe themselves to be responsible for such students.

I made only a little progress before I left. Candidates for 'remedial' classes were no longer decided by the summer term tests. All students were allowed at least to start French lessons and during their first half-term in the school I assessed who might most benefit from working with me. However, once these students were removed from French they still could not go back. In a way they formed a third layer in the school: a sub-group extracted from the 'middle' bands. To members of the modern languages department they were deemed ineducable and for many teachers, regardless of the subject that they taught, these students were mistakes that had got through the school's covert admission policy.

Communist activities in the English department

Another memory I have of Hartbrook School is also related to how students were grouped and selected. I remained a member of the English department throughout my time there and during one of our departmental meetings we discussed the possibility of teaching English to year seven students in mixed attainment classes. We did not propose mixed attainment in any other subject, nor for any other year group. We were concerned that 'middle' band students were often less motivated than 'upper' band ones and therefore 'harder' to teach and also we were increasingly aware that the line drawn between the two groups was a fuzzy one. We wrote a paper to express our ideas and

distributed it to all staff in the school to act as a discussion document for the next staff meeting.

Staff meetings took place termly and my recollection of them is that uniform dominated all debate. For example, I can recall vividly one particular hot summer's evening sitting around a circle of tables in the canteen, with the smell of school lunches hanging over us. The discussion ranged backwards and forwards over the topic of white socks. In essence boys were to be punished if they wore them and girls were to be punished if they did not. Members of the English department were perhaps naïve to think that a staff meeting was a suitable forum in which to discuss issues relating to curriculum policy and the organisational structures of the school. Certainly it was unusual. However, the reaction we received was stranger than we could have anticipated. Few staff made comments to support us or even asked questions. Some staff became angry and insulting. Members of the senior management team sat back and let order collapse. Then somebody called out, "You're a bunch of communists". The meeting ground to a halt. It was the summer of 1984: the year Orwell (1949) set his futuristic political satire in which one of the *Ministry of Truth's* three key slogans was "*Ignorance is strength*".

The subject was never raised again although as members of the English department we were conscious of the animosity we had stirred. I think we took a strange pride in being recreated as demons. We chose to exclude ourselves from the rest of the staff, although looking back now I am not sure how this benefited the students. At the end of that term the usual staff lunch was organised after the students had gone home. The English department decided to wear red clothes to show our supposed allegiance to the Communist Party.

We entered the lunch as a group and holding a banner on which one of us had painted in large letters: "THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT IS WELL RED". Nearly two decades later the school continues to arrange students into 'upper' and 'middle' bands although now a small number of subjects are taught in mixed attainment classes in year seven only.

Belonging to a wider educational community

During an Open Evening in 1984, my final year at the school, the headteacher, on visiting my classrooms, seemed agitated. He asked me to remove the sign on one of the doors which said, by then, "Special Needs Department". Rather tersely he explained that he did not want potential parents to think that Hartbrook School was suitable for children who needed extra help with their learning. The school was situated in an area where there were a number of other schools in close proximity and competition amongst them to attract students was intense. Hartbrook School was always over-subscribed so the headteacher and governors deliberately concentrated on attracting children from middle-class families who they considered to be more academically able. My department did not support the public image that they wished to promote.

Hartbrook School was intensely unpopular with staff from other local secondary schools. Some were already experiencing falling rolls even before Hartbrook moved into the area and there remains even now some confusion as to why the local education authority allowed it to do so. Not only did Hartbrook affect the numbers of students attending other schools, its admissions procedures 'creamed off' the more academic and/or middle-class students. Whilst I worked there I was married to a teacher from one of these schools. When I met his colleagues they would voice their anger about the

presence of this cuckoo in the nest. At meetings I attended at the local Teachers' Centre I learnt to avoid mentioning where I worked. Some ten years after Hartbrook was established in the LEA, the school where my husband taught was forced to close because of falling numbers. It had served the community of a housing estate not just as a school but also as a venue for local activities. This resource was lost and the children were dispersed among a number of other schools.

Not only was the school ostracised by neighbouring secondary schools, members of the senior management team also chose to keep it separate from the aspects of the wider educational community. For example, as head of the 'remedial' department I was contacted by an educational psychologist from the LEA to offer me support with students' learning. The headteacher insisted that he was present at our interview and I was told to make it quite clear that we had no need of her help whatsoever. She never returned. He explained to me afterwards that the school was like a 'family': we looked after our problems and did not welcome outside interference. However, as I knew from my childhood experiences, family life can be damaging for its members.

Being a Head of Department at Shelbourn Village College

In this section I reflect on my experiences as a head of department at Shelbourn Village College. Its cultures were shaped by a very different set of ideological beliefs from those I had encountered elsewhere. It was premised on the rights of students to be educated in their local school, whereas in contrast, admission to Hartbrook School was bestowed as a privilege. These values imbued policies and practices throughout the college, including the work of

my department. Its role was to support the participation of all students using a flexible student-centred approach. Professional relationships between staff were also more open and democratic and all teachers were encouraged to participate in decision-making. However, as one of my tales reveals, these principles could be circumvented when other conflicting principles took precedence. This was also the first school in which I taught where teachers expected to work until they were exhausted. This level of commitment had both advantages and disadvantages.

Working within a community comprehensive ideal

In 1985 I started a new job as head of the special educational needs department at Shelbourn Village College, for eleven to sixteen year-olds. It was the closest I came to working in a comprehensive community school. This was partly because of its rural location, which provided its own natural catchment area. Parents/carers could choose other schools for their children but the local education authority only provided free transport if students attended their catchment school. Choosing an alternative school could be costly for families in terms of time and money and, anyway, Shelbourn was highly regarded locally.

The college set out to be comprehensive in its intake, by welcoming all local students to attend. Also, students were very rarely excluded for disciplinary reasons once on roll, although I remember one boy being sent to a 'special' school, designated for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, because of repeated acts of violence towards a number of younger students. The college was also a community comprehensive in many of its values. These originated in the ideals set out by Henry Morris in the 1920s when he first

established the concept of the village college (Morris, 1924). Fundamental to his beliefs was the notion of serving the local community through the provision of education for everyone, from the 'cradle to the grave'.

The college facilities were seen as belonging to the whole community and not just staff and students. On my way to lessons I might come across a parent/carer with a toddler in a pushchair arriving for a playgroup session, or an elderly person about to start a game of in-door bowls. The local public library was based in the college, as was the swimming pool. Evening classes in a range of subjects were held on site and so was the local youth club. The college was used as a venue for public performances by travelling theatre companies and orchestras. Even the choir provided an example of how everyone was encouraged to participate in college activities: its membership was open to students, staff, parents and villagers.

Learning to be a different kind of head of department

My role at Shelbourn Village College was very different from that at Hartbrook School. I was part of a team, including pastoral staff, which was responsible for supporting the participation of any students experiencing difficulties during their time at the college. Whilst this might involve the provision of basic literacy and numeracy, the scope of my work was now far broader. There was a genuine willingness to fit education to the students and not the other way round. For example, quite soon after joining the College I was asked to come up with strategies for supporting the participation and learning of two new students. One was a girl in year eight who had a profound hearing loss and the other was a boy in year nine who arrived at the college after having been excluded from other mainstream schools. Later on in that first year I worked

with staff from the village primary school to support the education of a number of children from travelling families.

I found my job exciting and I thrived on the challenges it provided. I was anxious, at times, about whether I would cope with its demands, although as a new head of department, and a fairly young one at age twenty-eight, I did not have the courage to voice my concerns. However, I survived and this was partly due to the support I received from other staff and, in particular, two deputy wardens (the title given to the position of deputy headteacher). To begin with I found both of these women terrifyingly competent. I was dismayed by the high expectations they had of what I would achieve in my job. I was never quite sure if they were simply asking for my views on a student or checking up on me. I was expected to be able to justify every decision I made. My progress, like that of all heads of departments, was closely monitored. At times I missed the casual insouciance of my previous school. However, I learnt to value this support and even to be able to argue with the deputy wardens. At Hartbrook School I had not been accustomed to such professional debate.

Power, control and democracy

There were many different forums for staff discussion in the college and the decision-making processes were set up to be open and democratic. However, in some cases, members of the senior management team would circumvent these structures and impose their views regardless of their unpopularity. To begin with I did not fully appreciate how college decisions were manipulated in this way because, compared to Hartbrook School, any discussion seemed refreshingly open but in time I became more aware of these pressures.

When I was appointed it was understood that I would phase out 'remedial' withdrawal lessons and introduce support in the classroom with an emphasis on helping all staff to take responsibility for all students. I was enthusiastic about putting these changes into place as they satisfied my growing concerns about the inadequacies of 'remedial' teaching. I wanted to be able to provide flexible support for all students without stigmatising any in particular. Also I wanted support to be given in the context of actual lessons.

As with all major changes at the college, members of staff were invited to voice any concerns they had about this initiative, which was certainly going to have an impact on the majority of them. A number of staff were undecided about moving towards in-class support and yet it was clear that whatever the opposition, it was going to be introduced. Apart for anything else, I had been appointed on the understanding that I would do so. Setting up discussions amongst the staff helped to allay some anxieties but the real decision had already been made many months earlier.

Inevitably, the changes took place. Some members of staff were immediately enthusiastic, others were less sure, whilst a few were passively resistant. However, over the three years in which I worked in the college the new system was generally accepted. Many staff found it helpful, both for them and for the students, to have another adult working alongside them in the classroom. Also, as it became the established practice staff simply got used to it. As for new teachers joining the college, they knew no alternative.

Staff relationships

Amongst the teachers there was generally a strong commitment to being professional and doing a good job, although there were some exceptions. Certainly, I had never worked so hard. Like most staff I felt tired by the end of each week and exhausted by the end of each term. Again, this was very different from Hartbrook School. At the college there was a sense of pride in keeping going, staying late, working every evening and weekend during term time. However, there was also perhaps less fun. The staffroom was often empty: nobody had time for casual chatting. Lunch breaks were for marking, preparing lessons and meeting colleagues and students.

At Hartbrook School I had played bridge most lunchtimes: except on Fridays when many of us went to a local pub. This would have been difficult to imagine at Shelbourn. However, these earlier experiences had advantages: it is less easy to teach well when one is exhausted. Also, regular social contact with colleagues at Hartbrook School spilt over into our professional relationships. When I had wanted to observe students working across different curriculum areas, the members of staff I approached initially were other bridge players. No meetings were held and no votes were taken. They let me watch them at work as an act of friendship.

Some Reflections on Including Myself

In 1988 the local education authority seconded me for a term to work on a research project. I never returned to teaching although I have subsequently visited many schools, when working briefly in local education authority administration and more extensively as a researcher. My experience of schools

is now much wider: encompassing nursery, primary and secondary, mainstream and 'special', day and residential, as well as schools in Mumbai and Chennai during my short time in India. This breadth of experience has contributed to my understanding of school cultures and processes of and barriers to participation. However, it is the depth of knowledge, developed as a member of a school, which informs these autobiographical tales. My experience of teaching, since 1988, has been confined to tutoring adult students on university education courses. Yet, despite over a decade outside the classroom, in writing this chapter I have come to realise how strongly I still identify myself professionally as a teacher.

All of the six schools described in these tales share institutional characteristics that make them recognisably schools and yet each one has its own set of unique cultures. For example, my primary school in the 1960s has many elements in common with, say, Shelbourn Village College in the 1980s, such as subject based curricula, staff hierarchies, timetabled days and weeks, and so forth. However, even within each individual school these cultures are experienced differently by its different members. To be a student in a 'upper' band at Hartbrook School would not be the same as being one in a 'middle' band or, indeed, the same as working there as a newly qualified female teacher or an established male head of department.

These complexities are an important element when exploring the significance of the concept of school cultures in understanding participation in schools. Through a critical examination of these autobiographical tales I have developed further my understanding of the central concepts of the thesis and the nature of the relationships between them. In doing so certain themes,

described below, have emerged which have helped to shape the structural arrangement of the subsequent chapters on Bowden School.

External worlds, private and public

Students and staff bring into a school their private worlds, often unseen but constantly present. Whilst these are formed within the cultures in which they live, they also help to shape the cultures of a school. They are created not only through identities - gender, ethnicity, class and poverty/wealth - but also through the emotional lives of individuals and their families. Misunderstandings, prejudice and ignorance about these '*ghosts in the classroom*' are barriers to the participation of students and staff. School cultures are also partly determined by external worlds that are social and political. For example, these tales illustrate how an ideology based on the selection and categorisation of students has influenced education provision for many decades in the UK. This is revealed in the system of grammar/secondary modern schools as well as the structures which individual schools use to organise students into streams, bands and sets (see Chapter Six, *Interacting with External Worlds*).

Institutional relationships

In each of the six schools described in this chapter, the relationships between and amongst students and staff have been shaped by their institutional cultures. For example, as a student I experienced very different relationships with staff at my primary school compared to those formed with staff at my secondary school. Hierarchies and status determine who has power and control and who does not. These in turn reflect who is valued and devalued

within a school's cultures. Supportive relationships, based on mutual trust and worth, help to increase the participation of members, whilst those established on mistrust, fear and divisions are barriers to participation (see Chapter Seven, *Forming Relationships within the Institutional Structures of a School*).

Supporting classroom learning

Responses to student diversity are demonstrations of how learners are valued and devalued within the cultures of a school. For example, as a teacher, my role developed from that of withdrawing small groups of students from mainstream lessons for 'remedial' literacy and numeracy classes, to one in which the emphasis was on supporting all students within the context of the classroom. To some extent this shift reflects developments in educational policies and practices nationally. However, the reluctance of Hartbrook School to change, and the speed with which in-class support became common practice at Shelbourn Village College, is an indication of the differences between their cultures and underlying ideological beliefs (see Chapter Eight, *Supporting Classroom Learning: Valuing Diversity?*).

CHAPTER FIVE

INTRODUCING BOWDEN SCHOOL

"Cultures are not scientific 'objects' (assuming such things exist even in the natural sciences)... There is no whole picture that can be "filled in", since the perceptions and filling of a gap lead to the awareness of another gap."

(Clifford, 1986a, pp.18-9)

Chapter Five is an introduction to the case study on Bowden School. Its primary purpose is to present the school as a tangible place in time and space, peopled by 'real' students and staff. In this way it sets the scene for the detailed exploration of the school's cultures which is given in the following three chapters. As Clifford points out, cultures can not be dissected like "scientific 'objects'": there can be "no whole picture" for there will always be another gap". However, these four chapters form a case study in which, through reflection and analysis, a greater understanding of the school's cultures has emerged. Together, they make a further contribution to addressing the research questions of the thesis.

Background to the School

This section offers some contextual information about Bowden School. I relate the history of the school as an institution and its place within the city of Markston. I provide some background information about its students and their families. I then describe the buildings and physical facilities that comprise the school site. Finally, I outline some of the school's organisational arrangements for staff and for students.

An historical perspective: shifting populations, changing educational provision

Archives in Markston City Library note that in 1891 the village of Bowden was predominately a farming community with a population of two hundred and sixteen. By the 1920s Bowden had become an industrial area with a rapidly rising population and in 1929 it was incorporated into Markston City Council. By 1991, the factories had been replaced by housing and in the national census of that year its population was given as 7,098.

This pattern of population growth and urbanisation was repeated in and around the city of Markston and had a huge impact on the city's educational provision. In 1824, when its first national school was opened, the population of Markston was under five thousand. By 1903, the population had risen to thirty-one thousand, served by thirteen elementary schools. Some sixty years later there were thirty-one primary and secondary schools in the city area. The biggest change came in 1967 when the government formally designated Markston for development under the New Towns Act with the intention of increasing its population by one hundred thousand between the years 1970 to 1985. By 1988 the population of Markston had reached 134,000 and the city was served by one nursery, fifty-four primary, twelve comprehensive and six special schools.

Bowden's first school opened in 1901 for seventeen children aged three to eight years: a single room that still forms part of the local Infants' School. A second school was built in 1908 for junior aged children. In 1936 the council demolished farmland to build a housing estate, playing fields and a secondary school. Bowden Senior Mixed Council School opened in 1939 for 234 students aged eleven to fourteen. Following the 1944 Education Act it was designated a secondary modern school. In 1976 the council decided that the city's eight

secondary modern and three grammar schools should become comprehensives. As part of this development a programme of building works took place at Bowden so it could, for the first time, include students in the sixth form. It reopened in 1978 as a comprehensive school for eleven to eighteen year-olds. Theoretically, all the city schools now had equal status and their intake comprised students with the full range of attainments. They were open to all students and the local education authority expected parents/carers to choose for their children the comprehensive school nearest to where they lived.

Bowden School students: their homes and families

In 1995 the local council produced a select committee report, entitled *Deprivation and Disadvantage*. This covered not only Markston but also the Shire county to which the city had been administratively joined in 1974 until it once again became a unitary authority in 1998. It noted that seventy per cent of families living in rented accommodation received housing benefits, compared with a national figure of twenty per cent of all households, forty-seven per cent were on income support and twenty per cent of children were living in homes with nobody in paid employment. The report considered its findings in terms of the then current European Union definition of poverty:

"People, families and communities whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from a minimal acceptable way of life." (paragraph 2.5)

According to this, of the total one hundred and fifty wards in Shire, twenty were highlighted as being "*significantly*", "*moderately*" or "*other disadvantaged*". Bowden was placed amongst the latter group as being "*other disadvantaged*".

The school itself is set in the middle of a mixed housing estate about two and a half miles from the city centre. Some of the houses date back to the 1920s when Bowden became increasingly urban, however the majority of homes were built in the 1970s and 1980s in response to the demands of New Town initiatives. Bowden is connected to, and separated from, other areas of Markston by ring roads, roundabouts and out-of-town shopping complexes.

When I first visited the school it had 1,330 students on roll, with a capacity for 1400. Within the student population there are substantial socio-economic variations, which are not revealed through eligibility figures for free school meals. For Bowden School this is broadly the same as the national average of 15.8% (DfES, 2001). However, over a third of its students live in the neighbouring ward of Denton, which is amongst the ten per cent of most deprived electoral wards nationally.

About eight per cent of students are from ethnic minority groups: mainly Pakistani Muslims, but also including some from the Hindu communities as well as East African Asians and others from Sikh families. The school's 1998 Ofsted report noted that for eighty students the language spoken at home is other than English, mainly Punjabi or Urdu.

Ofsted also reported that the school had 369 (28%) students entered on the register of 'special educational needs'. Thirty-eight students (2.9%) have 'statements', which is fairly high compared to the national average of 2.2% (DfES, 2001). In addition, Markston Education Authority funds, through an 'enhanced resources' scheme, thirty-five places for students who are designated as having 'moderate learning difficulties'. These students are drawn from one half of the city. The majority of them live outside Bowden's

catchment area and so are brought to school by taxi. There is a parallel scheme with another school on the other side of Markston.

Sandra Stephens has taught at the school for twenty-six years and has lived locally for all but three years of her life. She describes the student intake as follows:

"We tend to get children who are average and below because of the poor catchment areas... When I go to the primary schools there are some who are considered to be very bright, but not many... they tend to go to other schools... But we've got some lovely children here."

She argues that the intake has scarcely changed since Bowden was a secondary modern school. It is still skewed towards lower attainment students. Those who are considered more able generally go elsewhere to schools such as The Cathedral.

Philip Cleary, head of the learning support department, adds this perspective about the students and their families:

"There are a lot of good kids in this school who are well adjusted, well motivated, got good supportive family backgrounds, who want to work and want to do well... They aren't always top academics... But staff would say there are also a lot of kids with problems... There is a large tail end who are not supported at home. They rely upon the school as the only stable part of their lives and they don't perhaps achieve as well as they could. I think staff are worried by that large tail end."

Some of these concerns about students, their homes and families, are discussed further in Chapters Six and Seven.

The school site and buildings

The school is divided into teaching blocks based on curriculum areas. Because of the reorganisation of secondary schools in Markston, many of these were built between 1976 and 1978, although some are part of the original 1939 school. A £1.3 million building programme, completed in 1998, provided a new arts centre, technology centre and extension to the science block. Buildings are in a reasonable state of repair although some of the older ones are a little shabby. The main administrative block includes the English department's teaching rooms as well as the staffroom, head and deputies' offices and the school's main reception area. This is always open during school hours, providing visitors with a welcoming introduction to Bowden. It includes easy chairs, plants, display boards referring to the school, examples of students' work and an invariably friendly greeting from office staff.

Although an urban school, the site at Bowden School includes playing fields, numerous trees and two conservation areas, one with a pond, for scientific studies. Benches are set around the hard playgrounds for students to meet and socialise. Getting from a building at one end of the site to another at the opposite extreme takes time. This can be both a reason and an excuse for students' late arrival for lessons. Covered walkways have been erected to keep people dry although these can become congested between one lesson ending and the next beginning. Many of the buildings are two storeys in height. This, together with the walkways, makes the school an unsuitable site for people who are wheelchair users. The arrangement of the numerous buildings makes supervising students during break and lunchtimes difficult, although only those in years twelve and thirteen are allowed inside.

Staff at Bowden School

Figure 5:1 shows the composition of staff at the beginning of my final term at Bowden School. Some of the teaching staff have worked at the school for many years whilst others are newly or recently qualified teachers. In the four years prior to my first visit there had been a teaching staff turnover of thirty per cent. Some vacancies have been filled by supply teachers. For example, the science department had three members of staff on long-term sick leave.

Figure 5:1 Composition of staff at Bowden School

- sixty-four teachers
- ten learning support assistants
- language support assistant
- modern languages assistant
- seventeen administrative / technical staff
- two caretakers
- eleven school meals staff and mid-day supervisors
- school nurse
- behaviour support teacher ***
- educational welfare officer ***

*** Attached to a number of schools and funded by Markston Education Authority

The organisation of teaching staff at Bowden School comprises three management structures: the senior management team, heads of faculties and departments and the pastoral team. When David Roberts was appointed as headteacher in 1995 he restructured staffing arrangements in two ways. First, he extended the senior management team by adding two extra assistant deputy headteachers and second, he increased the number of pastoral houses from six to seven and therefore created a new head and deputy head of house. Added together, there are thirty-one positions of responsibility amongst the teaching staff of Bowden School; that is, nearly half the total number of sixty-

four (see Figure 5:2). Therefore whilst the structure is hierarchical it is broadly based.

Figure 5:2 Bowden School's management structures

(i) Senior Management Team

- Headteacher
- First deputy headteacher
- Two deputy headteachers
- Four assistant deputy headteachers (***) also heads of faculties)

(ii) Curriculum Team

- Seven heads of faculties: design and technology, English, ***expressive arts, humanities, mathematics, modern languages and ***science
- Four heads of departments: language support, learning support, music and physical education

(iii) Pastoral Team

- Seven heads of houses
- Seven deputy heads of houses

Each member of staff I interviewed described their relationships with colleagues as being friendly and supportive. The following comments are typical:

"It's a friendly school... I haven't had anything other than support ... If I've had a problem I've always been given back up."

(learning support assistant)

"The staff here are really friendly. I think the main ethos is really caring. I know it sounds a bit twee, but I do. It's a caring environment... everybody is valued here, staff and students."

(head of house)

I too experienced this support and friendship particularly within the learning support department.

Organisational responses to student diversity

As is common practice in most UK secondary schools, Bowden School classifies, selects and orders its 1,300 students in a range of ways, but always in response to the notion of difference. Sometimes the intention is to reduce student diversity, such as arranging teaching group in same-age classes, and sometimes the intention is to promote it, such as aiming for a balance between girls and boys in those same classes. Indeed, these two particular forms of organisation are applied to students at Bowden School almost without notice.

Other responses to student diversity are more considered. For example, teaching and learning arrangements are decided by members of individual faculties/departments. Some choose to teach 'mixed attainment' classes whilst others prefer setting by 'attainment'. Further details about this are provided in Chapter Eight. Meanwhile, students are deliberately arranged in mixed-age tutor and house groups as part of the school's pastoral system and the justifications for this approach are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Students are further divided into those who are perceived as requiring additional support and those who are not, as discussed in Chapter Eight. For example, the school's language support team uses a staged approach to select students who will receive their extra help. This is based on five levels of language acquisition: from one, which is classified as a 'new arrival' to five, which is 'fluent'. The number on their register is approximately ten per cent of all students with about half of those requiring some support from the team. An 'Alternative Curriculum' is provided for a small number of students, mainly in years ten and eleven, who are considered at risk of being formally excluded from the school for disciplinary reasons. When I interviewed the co-ordinator

of this provision she was working with eighteen students, sixteen of whom were male.

The majority of additional support, however, is provided by members of the learning support department. Students are categorised according to the stages set out in the then current *Code of Practice* (DfE, 1994) which included, at stage five, those who are made the subject of a 'statement of special educational needs'. These students, plus others on the higher stages, are the recipients of in-class support from learning support teachers and/or LSAs. Reading tests are administered to all year seven students and those with the lowest scores are withdrawn from mainstream English lessons to attend so-called 'reading workshops' run by the department.

Philip Cleary, the head of the department, maintains a register of all students who are referred to his department. These referrals are made by staff from local primary schools or the local education authority before students arrive at the school and by staff at Bowden School once they are there. The scale of this system is noted in his comment below:

"If you look at my special needs register there have been times when it's approached the four hundred mark for students with learning difficulties or behaviour difficulties."

Here, yet another division is made: between students whose difficulties are perceived of as being related to learning and those whose difficulties are considered to be behavioural. Although in practice such distinctions are often rather fuzzy they are important as they impact upon the type of support provided. For example, the limited hours available for counselling are specifically directed at those students whose behaviour is the focus of concern.

The Learning Support Department

This section looks in more detail at the learning support department at Bowden School. I focus on this particular group of staff because, as a learning support assistant (LSA), this was the context in which I developed my understandings of the school’s cultures. I begin by introducing its members, both the LSAs and the learning support teachers. I then describe the learning support centre and some of the activities that took place within it.

Introducing the learning support assistants

Figures 5:3 and 5:4 list the names and roles of members of the learning support department. These were the people with whom I spent most of my breaks and lunchtimes whilst at the school. I visited some of their homes, met their children, exchanged Christmas presents, asked for help, complained and laughed. I was made most welcome.

Figure 5:3 Learning support assistants at Bowden School	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Carol Marina- Catherine O'Connor- Jane Lee: senior LSA- Joanna York- Julie Morgan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Linda Ripley- Maria Channing- Muriel Hammond- Sophie Atkins- Stella Wade

When I began at the school there were nine learning support assistants (LSAs) and in my second term a tenth, Julie Morgan, was appointed. The *Departmental Handbook* defines the purpose of their job as being:

“To assist in the support of pupils with special educational needs to enable them to access the curriculum as fully as possible.”

They are paid for thirty-two and a half hours a week, or six and a half hours a day, during school terms only. This covers them for the length of the school day with a half hour unpaid break at lunch time. They receive no remuneration if they work outside these times although most of the LSAs do extra hours and some of them do many more than their contracts require. Despite the poor pay of between £5.55 and £7.77 per hour, and no pay at all for a quarter of the year, when a vacancy was advertised in the local press twenty-six people applied.

The major part of their job involves working alongside a small number of students in mainstream classes. As part of this, LSAs also offer to support class teachers by devising differentiated materials, as well as providing information and feedback about specific students. When an LSA is assigned to a teaching group she is responsible for setting up and running a class folder. This includes comments about specific students' progress and difficulties, examples of materials used, as well the students' individual education plans, as part of the staged process of the *Code of Practice*. LSAs contribute to the development and review of these plans by assisting learning support teachers to compile statutory reviews for students who have statements of 'special educational needs'.

LSAs also run the department's reading and maths workshops. These are tightly structured programmes for students, in years seven, eight and nine, who are withdrawn from mainstream English and maths classes on the basis of their perceived weakness in either literacy or numeracy skills. The groups are small in size, usually between two and five. Each LSA is also allocated to one of the houses that structure the pastoral system. Finally, they attend in-

service training days and meetings that take place during school time: morning briefings, house and department meetings.

In addition to these generic responsibilities, most LSAs make other contributions to the department. For example, Linda Ripley orders stock and Sophie Atkins mounts and displays students' work throughout the department's rooms. They are timetabled to have approximately one non-contact lesson each day but this is often used to cover for absent LSA colleagues. Lunchtimes are taken up with homework club and seeing individual students. The majority of LSAs arrive early or leave late to ensure that their assigned tasks are completed. Even then, when the department needed redecorating, a group of them painted the rooms in the evenings and at weekends.

Whilst I was there Jane Lee was promoted to senior LSA: a new post for the school. She is responsible for the administration of all reading tests in the department. She coordinates and maintains the reading workshops and decides which students return to mainstream English classes and when. She manages the cover timetable when LSAs are absent. As senior LSA, she is allowed two additional non-contact lessons in which to do these extra duties and so necessarily takes work home. She is also paid an additional £750 a year which amounts to less than sixty pence extra an hour.

Introducing the learning support teachers

There are four learning support teachers in the department, plus one of the deputy headteachers, Mary Butler. Like their LSA colleagues, they support students and staff in mainstream lessons as well as run reading and maths

workshops. The *Departmental Handbook* defines their administrative role as being:

"Responsible for a proportionate number of students identified... as requiring the extra resources of the learning support team: monitoring progress and ensuring needs are being met, compiling annual reviews and... making home visits if necessary."

Each one also has specific additional responsibilities, as set out in Figure 5:4, which summarises information provided in the *Departmental Handbook*.

Figure 5:4 Learning support teachers at Bowden School

Philip Cleary – head of department

As 'learning support coordinator' he:

Oversees the school's 'special needs' policy;

- Coordinates and identifies the assessment of, and provision for, 'students with 'special educational needs';
- Maintains the school's 'special needs register' with regard to the Code of Practice and oversee teachers' records which form students' individual education plans (IEPs);
- Advises mainstream teachers on how students might meet planned learning objectives;
- Liaises with parents and students and with outside agencies.

As head of the Learning Support Department

- "Aims to create harmony, encourage thoughts, devise procedures and monitor performance" of team (generic for all departments);
- Manages day-to-day running of the department;
- Devises the department's timetable.

Sharon Houghton - second in department

- Coordinates the department's primary schools liaison work;
- Coordinates key stage 4 and post-16 courses for students designated as having 'special educational needs';
- Coordinates and reports on the initial reading assessment of students.

Shirley Dunton

- Coordinates the department's maths 'workshops';
- Coordinates the *"development of students' self-esteem through organised activities"* (e.g. adventure holidays).

Kelly Whitbread

- Coordinates the *"coloured overlay programme"* (transparent coloured sheets thought to assist some students' reading);
- Undertakes primary liaison in a selection of schools.

Mary Butler

- Acts as the school's 'named person': *"is informed by the LEA when they conclude that a student has special educational needs and is responsible for ensuring that all appropriate people know about students' needs."*

Apart from Mary Butler the learning support teachers also teach between four and six mainstream lessons a week and act as the 'link person' with the department in which they work. Philip Cleary works in the physical education department; Sharon Houghton in technology; Shirley Dunton in mathematics; Kelly Whitbread in history. They are also form tutors.

Setting the scene: the learning support centre

The Learning Support Department is on the top floor of a two storey building, situated in the middle of the school site. In practical terms this allows support staff to return and collect class folders quickly and get on to their next lesson. Philip Cleary, head of department, explained to me that its position is also symbolic of the central role the department plays in the school. The school library occupies most of the ground floor which helps to create a sense of the

building being a teaching and learning resource. The office for the Language Support Team is also on the ground floor.

The top floor is referred to as the learning support centre, or in abbreviated school jargon, the LSC. It comprises an office, two main teaching rooms, a computer area and a number of smaller rooms for group work. The two teaching rooms are also form rooms. This again is a deliberate attempt to make the centre seem a place for all students and not only those perceived as having learning difficulties.

The hub of the centre is the office. This is where student records are filed, resources stored and where staff keep their work and personal belongings. Philip Cleary's desk is here with his computer full of students' individual education plans, statutory reviews, and so forth. Adjacent to it is a noticeboard with the weekly changing departmental timetable and sheaves of A4 paper with lists of students' names, groups, reading ages, review dates, or whatever. There is the coffee rota for break and lunch times, as well as suggestions for the next departmental social outing, of which there is at least one a term. The office is cramped, especially when all fifteen members are present at the same time. They congregate there in the morning before school, at break and lunch times. Like other departments, members of the LSD use the office to work, rest, socialise and let off steam. The school staffroom is used for large meetings but rarely for relaxation.

Joining the department

The following extracts are taken from two weeks of my journal, about halfway through my time as an LSA. They are my observations of members of the

department during break and lunchtimes. They portray the staff with whom I most closely worked whilst at Bowden School and provide insights into the nature of the department and its work.

Journal extract: learning support department

It's only the second week of term and everyone looks exhausted. Sharon and Linda complain about being tired. Catherine joins in saying her husband is moaning about her bringing work home since she does not get paid to do so.

(ref: 10/9/en)

Sophie gets everyone's attention and then loudly tells them a complicated joke about a banana, a nun, a prostitute and a housewife, with accompanying actions. There are hoots of laughter and a few disapproving faces. Philip looks as if he's trying to concentrate very hard on the computer screen. I wonder how he feels being the only man amongst all these females.

(ref: 14/9/bg)

Sharon asks me to take homework club. I inwardly groan because I just want to do nothing this lunch hour. However, the half hour goes quickly as I wrack my brains to support students on a number of disparate topics, including:

- *writing a letter in German to a new pen pal;*
- *what to wear in a coffin;*
- *ten uses for a baked bean can on a desert island;*
- *drawing pictures to represent God, life after death, the creation.*

Five minutes before the end, a boy raises his hand and asks me to help him. He has written in his homework diary: "What is a plumb bob? When and how would you use one?" I run out of ideas at this point.

(ref: 21/9/lt)

Jane says she can not wait to get home. She tells me that this is her thirtieth wedding anniversary and she is going out for supper and to the theatre tonight.

(ref: 14/9/lt)

I give Sophie the brochure about courses I picked up from the Open University. She wants to know what the tutors will be like and how much work she'll have to do. I try to be helpful.

(ref: 21/9/bg)

Philip asks me if I'll stay until the end of term but I explain I can not. He looks irritated even though I am leaving on the date we originally agreed. There are two LSAs on long-term sick leave. Sharon shows him a job advert for senior lecturer in leisure management. "Less stress than you get here," she says.

(ref: 21/9/lt)

The majority of staff in the department work hard and some very hard indeed. Their jobs demand energy, resourcefulness and good humour. I certainly found it tiring although I was only part-time and always knew it was just temporary. Friendships provide necessary support. As working colleagues they exchange ideas, discuss concerns about students, acknowledge when their efforts are not successful and sympathise with others when they concede the same. These relationships spread out into their lives outside school: worries about their children, marital harmonies and disharmonies, flooded bathrooms, aches and pains. These fragments of autobiography inform their working days and are an important part of the cultures of the department. A number of them live in the catchment area and some have children at the school. Their friendships in the department, and connections with the school, cut across nominal notions of public and private lives.

Exploring the Cultures of Bowden School

The three chapters, which follow this one, form the body of the case study of Bowden School. Each one focuses on a theme as a way of exploring different aspects of its cultures. Throughout them all I continue to address the third research question, *"To what extent can the concept of school cultures contribute to the understanding and development of participation in schools?"* The choice of these themes has developed from my reading, as discussed in Chapter

Three, and my *Autobiographical Tales* related in Chapter Four, as well as from a growing understanding of Bowden School itself.

Theme one: Chapter Six, Interacting with External Worlds

Through this theme I explore ways in which the cultures of Bowden School interact with and are determined by its external worlds. I consider what these outside influences are and reflect on how they increase the participation of students and staff as well as form barriers to their learning and participation. I examine external worlds that are broadly political in nature by considering the impact of national and local politics on the school's policies and practices, beliefs and values. I also explore external worlds that are private: the lives which students and staff bring with them into Bowden School everyday. These are the "*ghosts in the classroom*". I discuss ways in which family, friends and neighbourhoods interact with, contribute to and are modified by the cultures of the school.

Theme two: Chapter Seven, Forming Relationships within the Institutional Structures of a School

I use this theme to examine ways in which relationships are formed, both overtly and covertly, within the institutional structures of Bowden School and how these impact upon the learning and participation of its members. I explore relationships amongst staff by focusing on the formal hierarchies of management and departmental structures as well as relationships between teaching and non-teaching staff. I also examine relationships amongst students by considering how far policies and practices promote and impede participatory relationships amongst students within the cultures of the school.

Finally, I explore how relationships between staff and students are determined. I consider the values and beliefs which underlie three of the formal structures which shape these relationships: the school's policies on rules and behaviour, the pastoral system and house/school student councils.

Theme three: Chapter Eight, Supporting Classroom Learning: Valuing Diversity?

Through this final theme I explore policies and practices operating in Bowden School to support the classroom learning of students. I reflect on how these are shaped by the sometimes contradictory beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning held by members of the school and, as such, are demonstrations of the ways in which different students are valued and devalued within its cultures. I examine school structures that shape classroom learning by focusing on timetabling and grouping policies. I also consider classroom practices by exploring approaches to teaching and learning used in the school and their impact on the participation of students. I end by examining the policies and practices of the learning support and the language support departments with regards to the provision of additional classroom support for targeted students.

Amy Hudson's stories

I end this chapter with some stories about Amy Hudson, a student from Bowden School. Their purpose is to illustrate that whilst a thematic approach is a useful device for writing about school cultures it is not how people experience the interconnectedness of their complex everyday lives. I met Amy on my first day at Bowden School. She was in year seven and I worked

alongside her class four times a week during the summer term and three times a week in the winter term, when they moved into year eight. The head of the learning support department told me that Amy lacked confidence and that her behaviour put her at risk of getting into trouble with class teachers. I noticed that when she became anxious she talked very loudly, often shouting. She could be outspokenly rude, determinedly bored and prone to mood swings. She was also friendly, enthusiastic and amusing.

From the start, I enjoyed being with Amy and by the end of my time at the school I liked her tremendously. She seemed keen to tell me about her everyday experiences: television programmes she had seen, visits to the dentist, new clothes, horse-riding lessons. However, she disclosed very little about the larger issues of her life: her relationship with her mother, her five half-siblings and her changing foster families. I found out something about her home by reading the student records kept in the learning support department. The following extracts, from these files and my journal, help to illustrate the three main themes I use to examine the cultures of Bowden School. They also indicate how features of these cultures both supported and formed barriers to Amy's participation in the life of the school.

Stories from Amy's student file

Whilst at primary school, Amy was made the subject of a Care Order under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989. She receives extra support at school, partly financed by the LEA's Looked After Children Education Team. In 1996 Amy was referred to an educational psychologist who noted that: *"Her ability lies well within the average range but her achievements are below those expected for a girl of her abilities. She is reported to be cheeky and stubborn in class and her behaviour has been described as attention seeking. She can be very loud in class and will shout out comments. Her concentration skills are poor*

and she is inclined to give up very easily. These things together get in the way of her learning."

In 1998, at a Child Care Review Meeting, it was decided that Amy should have a long-term foster placement. The minutes reported that: *"Her mother appears to be unable to manage her safely and any more short-term placements are seen to be detrimental to Amy's wellbeing."*

At the same meeting her current foster mother, of six months' standing, said that she: *"does not experience many problems with Amy who knows the boundaries that are set. Amy tends to be verbally aggressive when she is tired and also has had nightmares on the Saturdays when she has been in contact with her mother."*

Additional arrangements were also made so that Amy would continue to see her mother, brothers and sisters for one hour each Friday at a neighbourhood house and her mother for five hours every third Saturday. A report from Bowden School stated: *"Amy is now calmer and quieter at school and making very good progress."*

Her Individual Education Plan includes the following targets:

- *"Not suck her thumb" in geography;*
- *Increase her "confidence" through "reassurance" in French;*
- *"To be in control of her emotions and accept the rules of the class" across all subjects.*

Journal extract: science lesson year seven

Joan Miller starts complaining and nagging straight away. She gets angrier than I've seen before - she is yelling at them - and they are laughing at her. Amy is not responding well: she is shouting out loud continuously. It is so hot in the room today, which seems to add to the tense atmosphere. Rachel whispers to me to open a window. I go to do so but Joan calls out angrily, "You can stop that". Rachel looks embarrassed and mouths, "Sorry, miss."

"You shouldn't shout at the teachers," screams Amy.

At the end of the lesson Amy asks to have her 'behaviour report card' filled in. Joan deliberately makes her wait. She does not recognise that

Amy is ready to explode. Amy stands in the doorway, screams at the top of her voice, "You're a real bitch you are", and runs down the corridor. Back in the learning support department office I talk to Shirley Dunton about Amy's explosion at the end of the lesson. She is the teacher with responsibility for students in year seven with statements of 'special educational needs'. Shirley says she does not think Amy should be punished because of Joan Miller's incompetence. She suggests we do not report the incident. Amy is already on 'report' and this may lead to her being given a fixed term exclusion, which will not help her at all. I suspect Joan Miller won't do anything about it either. (ref: 15/7/1)

Journal extract: history lesson year seven

Georgina Franks asks the class questions based on last week's lesson about monks and monastic life. Some raise their hands but Amy starts shouting out the answers without waiting to be chosen. Georgina praises her for giving correct answers but then asks her to let others have a turn. Amy stops shouting and raises her hand. Georgina then asks for volunteers to read. Amy immediately offers to do so. She reads well although rather quietly.

As the class settles down to a written task, Georgina talks to Amy about her shouting. She does not reprimand her in front of her peers but ask her calmly if there is a problem. Amy mumbles about being in a bad mood. Georgina chats to her and praises her work from the previous history lesson. Amy visibly relaxes and works quietly until the lesson ends. (ref: 15/7/2)

These stories illustrate how both political and personal external worlds interact with the cultures of Bowden School. National legislation and local policies, designed to protect Amy, help to shape the provision made for her at school, in her home and with her family. It is clear that she also brings her private "ghosts" into school. Her nightmares, thumb sucking, lack of confidence and shouting are all part of who Amy is. These are acknowledged in

the records of the meetings held about her in which their possible consequences at school are also noted.

However, there is a lack of clarity about policy strategies to support Amy's learning and participation at Bowden. For example, the targets from her IEP merely tinker at the edges of her unhappiness. Why is it necessary for Amy to stop sucking her thumb? How is she to gain reassurance in French? What does being "*in control*" of Amy's emotions mean if her everyday experiences are often very miserable indeed? Their primary purpose seems to be to direct her to conform to notions of 'normal' student behaviour rather than for the school to take into account her experiences and adapt to her needs.

Amy's "*ghosts*" are clearly present in the lessons she attend. Some support is provided by LSAs but this is to prevent her getting into trouble. Again there is no expectation that the class teachers will respond to Amy's needs by modifying their teaching approaches. Joan Miller's shouting is a barrier to Amy's participation and yet in nearly every lesson this teacher got angry with Amy, and Amy always managed to shout even louder than her. In contrast Georgina Franks judges what support Amy needs: in this lesson she gives her time to calm down, praises her work and offers to help her. She also seems to understand that sometimes Amy needs to shout.

For both Joan Miller and Georgina Franks their teaching styles and their relationships with students are intricately bound up in their beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning. Joan expects these students to disrupt her lessons, she treats them with distrust and so allows them few opportunities to contribute actively to their own learning. Her lessons are poorly planned and presented with little evidence of enthusiasm. Georgina Franks expects the

same group of students to be engaged in their learning. Her lessons are structured and quietly busy. She is warm and friendly towards the students. Joan Miller devalues the students through her actions and attitudes, whereas Georgina Franks offers them a sense of their worth.

Within Bowden School there appears to be no professional and personal support for Joan Miller. She is left to manage one uncomfortable lesson after another regardless of her obvious need for advice. She does not seek help, nor is she offered it. Shirley Dunton does not consider how she or I could work with Joan to increase Amy's participation in future science lessons. Meanwhile, Amy's daily experience of school, despite the interventions of social services and the local education authority, do not always provide the security and kindness that she unquestionably requires if she is to participate more fully in the life of the school.

Journal extract: my last day as an LSA

Amy attaches a sticker of a cartoon mouse to the front cover of my journal. Underneath she writes:

"To Mrs Black Hack

Thank Bye

Love Amy X X X"

I give Amy a hug and then wonder if I am allowed to do so.

CHAPTER SIX

INTERACTING WITH EXTERNAL WORLDS

*"The public and the private can never be disentangled
...it is the way the social actor interacts with the
structures of society and the way this contributes to
their continuation or modification that is of interest.
Private acts are also therefore public acts."*

(Scott, 1998, p.43)

Bowden School does not exist in an autonomous vacuum. The boundaries of its cultures are permeated by its external worlds across time and space. In this chapter I examine some of the ways in which the cultures of the school have been modified by these interactions. I explore the significance of these changes in terms of increasing and/or reducing the participation of students and staff in different aspects of the life of the school. The chapter is in two parts. First, I consider external worlds that are broadly political in nature and second I explore the private worlds that are brought into Bowden School each day by its students and staff. Of course, this divide is not the reality of people's lives: as Scott notes in the quotation above, *"the public and the private can never be disentangled"*. Political decisions have personal repercussions and personal actions are constrained within political frameworks. Similarly, the stories in this chapter overlap.

Government Legislation

I begin by considering some of the effect of government education legislation on the cultures of Bowden School. First, I explore the legacy of selection. I argue that the grammar/secondary modern divide continues to influence students,

staff and local families who identify the school as less successful than others in Markston. I then examine more recent government legislation and argue that the cultures of the school have been modified by a national shift towards the marketisation of education premised on values such as competition, choice and accountability. I analyse some of the ways in which changes in the school's policies and practices brought about by this legislation has both increased as well as reduced the participation of students and staff.

The legacy of selection

Sandra Stephens began teaching at Bowden School when it was a secondary modern and she is still there twenty-six years later. She remembers how changing its status to that of a comprehensive, in 1976, seemed to make little difference to its student intake, staffing arrangements or curriculum.

"We all had to write and apply for our jobs... I don't know of anyone who didn't get them... It seemed just like a name change really... I don't remember the school changing much at all. We still did the same exam courses. I think what should of happened is that we had a lot more children coming who were brighter, the ones that had gone to the grammar schools."

She argues that even now the intake for Bowden School has not really changed. This seems to be partly the result of local housing policy decisions in Markston which have created areas of relative affluence but also pockets of extreme poverty and high unemployment. Large parts of Bowden's catchment area are drawn from the latter. Sandra Stephens also argues that local perceptions about the students encourage some parents/carers to apply to other schools: *"Bowden is in a poor catchment area and parents think it's going to have a lot of rough kids."* Changing the status of the school has not necessarily altered how

it is regarded locally by students and their families. Success still clings to the erstwhile grammar schools and failure to secondary moderns like Bowden.

"The old grammar schools... the Cathedral and the Manor, they're still going. We're all supposed to be comprehensives now, but, oh, some people think they're superior."

The belief in the continuing superiority of, particularly, the Cathedral School over Bowden is evidenced in the views of local families, including those who work at Bowden School. Jane Lee, a learning support assistant, moved to the catchment area about twenty years ago, when her children were at primary school. She explains why she chose the Cathedral for their secondary education:

"I got all the education stuff about how to work out what was a good school and what was a bad school and Bowden wasn't doing very well... Also, there were discipline things that you'd hear rumbling through the neighbourhood so I didn't want them to come here."

I asked if her views have changed with time and from her experiences of working at Bowden. With some hesitation, she replies:

"I don't know. I've got a different view... I've seen some really good stuff come out of here. We've got some dedicated teachers... It's really difficult. If I was perfectly honest, no, I still wouldn't send them here... I suppose if they had to come here, they'd have to make the most of it... But I would keep a good eye on them."

Even now these perceptions about the school persist amongst local families. Carol Marina, another LSA, grew up in Markston. She has a daughter in year nine at Bowden and another who is about to start in September. She too would have preferred them to attend the Cathedral School. Her reasons are partly based on the continuing mythologies surrounding the two schools.

"We knew we wouldn't get them in the best school in the city... the Cathedral School. That is the one state school that everyone wants their

children to go to... When I was a girl and went to the grammar school, Bowden wasn't viewed as a good school and I think that's tended to stick... The area that it's in there's a lot of council housing... I lived in a council house as a child so I'm not going against that. But... it just seemed to have that name when I was at school, and it's stuck even now."

Perceptions about the relative merits of Bowden School and the Cathedral have been further strengthened by government changes to the admissions criteria that are permissible for schools. In the case of the Cathedral these allow not only parents/carers to choose the school but, more importantly, for the school to choose its students. Its admissions criteria are shown in Figure 6:1.

Figure 6:1 Admissions criteria for the Cathedral School

Intake level of 120 places:

1. Up to fifty-eight places for children of worshipping members of the Church of England.
2. Up to eight places for Cathedral day choristers.
3. Children of staff.
4. Brothers and sisters of children at the school.
5. Children of worshipping members of other Christians denominations and other faiths.
6. Twelve places selected on overall academic ability.
7. Three places selected on overall musical ability.
8. Proximity to the school.

The first seven of these are likely to support the maintenance of its predominantly middle-class academic intake. Only its eighth criterion refers to "proximity to the school". It is not therefore a local school for local families. In this way it is able to select students from a wide area right across the city

including some who live in Bowden's catchment area. This has clear parallels with the grammar school system from Markston's past.

The publication of league tables has also helped to perpetuate the concept of the Cathedral as a 'better' school than Bowden. In 1999 over ninety per cent of the Cathedral students achieved at least five A to C grades at GCSE examinations. The figure at Bowden was thirty-five per cent. Staff at Bowden argue that these variations in academic success are largely determined by student intake rather than the quality of the educational experiences provided. To support this claim they stress that Bowden is excellent at working with less academically successful students. Nevertheless, such strengths help to reinforce the old cultural differences between schools based on notions of student attainment.

However, it simplifies the story of these two schools to suggest that differences between them are sustained by local perceptions and student intake alone. David Roberts, the headteacher, suggests that low expectations of students by staff have also contributed. He describes the school when he arrived three years ago.

"The school regarded itself not really as a comprehensive but as a secondary modern... [Staff] were depressing expectations because we've got some very bright kids... We've tried to get people to see that this is a school with potential, kids with potential and to release that we were going to have to take some risks."

Although opaquely articulated, his final point suggests that staff had/have low expectations of themselves as practitioners. He later describes his initial memories of classrooms in which *"silence was equated with work"*, students were *"passive"* and staff maintained *"a huge emphasis on control"*. However, from my observations of lessons I would challenge his assertion that during the

last three years teaching styles in the school have changed substantially. This is discussed in Chapter Eight, *Supporting Classroom Learning: Valuing Diversity?*.

The legacy of being a secondary modern school remains within the cultures of Bowden School and acts as a barrier to the participation of members of the school in a number of ways. Teachers are demoralised that their efforts are measured against schools such as the Cathedral. At the same time, by justifying these differences in terms of student intake, staff have low expectations about the abilities and behaviour of students. These assumptions inform their teaching and act as barriers to students' learning and participation. Furthermore, for some students there is the belief that Bowden will always be second best. In the two extracts from parents related here there is the sense that however well Bowden did it would never have been the first choice for their children. The school's relative failure is part of its cultures.

The marketisation of education

There is undoubtedly fierce competition amongst Markston's secondary schools to attract students. Bowden maintains a middle position in this educational market place. In 1999 with an intake limit of 240 places, the school was the first choice for 223 families (93%). One local school, however, is under threat of closure: its yearly intake level has been reduced to 120 by closing part of its site, but for the same year it was the first choice for only seventy-five parents/carers (62%). In contrast the first choice figures for the Cathedral School, with an intake level of 120 places, were 137 (114%). None of these percentages reveals the real preference of parents such as Carol Marina who would have put the Cathedral School as first choice for her daughter if she thought she might be given a place.

Despite Bowden School's relatively secure position in Markston, much effort is made, particularly by the senior management team, to ensure that student intake levels are maintained. For example, open evenings are taken very seriously indeed, as is any opportunity to promote the school in local papers. And, although the headteacher seems unwilling to acknowledge that there is any pressure on him, the influence of this competition is apparent. This has consequences for Bowden's staff and students alike. I asked the headteacher about this. The language he uses - "product", "sell", "recruit" - is, in itself, suggestive of the market place.

"In the end you become immune. My view is, if you have a good product it sells itself... One of the key influences is the recommendation of other parents. The better job you do the more likely you are to recruit."

Notwithstanding parental recommendations, it is clear that the school's position in the league tables is considered by the SMT to be crucial in attracting students, particularly from families described by the headteacher as "aspiring middle-class", or the school's "top end".

"The recruitment issue is not just about getting our two hundred and forty, it's about getting the right spread of two hundred and forty."

The dilemma is this: these potential students are considered necessary for future academic results but to attract them to the school the results of current students must be improved. The powerful drive to gain a higher position in the league tables has brought about changes in the cultures of the school which are both complex and incongruent.

On the one hand Bowden School takes a pride in valuing all its students regardless of notions of attainment. The headteacher espouses this belief:

"I said at the parents' evening... league tables tell you something about the school, but I'm looking at each kid's face when they pick up their

certificates. Because Simon Carter, Karl Powers, people like that, have all done brilliantly to get GCSEs of any sort. And those kids who got Ds and other lower passes, but worked liked stink, should be congratulated."

Yet on the other hand, higher examination results, particularly at GCSE, do improve the school's position in the league tables. Of course, encouraging all students to achieve their best is not incompatible with valuing them equally. However, it is the motivation – the underlying beliefs – behind this drive that is ambiguous. This is illustrated by Harry Hopkins, deputy headteacher, as he explains some of the changes in the school since the appointment of David Roberts as headteacher.

"The biggest single change has been the desire to get to know individual students. David is a very child-centred head... it's really a thrust of David's. And, in order to change that, we need as much data on them as possible. So we've got more base line testing... we've introduced various assessments throughout the years."

The process of getting to know students, being child-centred, is somehow equated with the production of academic results testing: the most important being those which inform the league tables.

This is further revealed in the policy initiative of selecting some students to participate in the school's mentoring scheme. The overt purpose of the scheme is to provide support for any student who might benefit from individual guidance. However, it seems to be largely driven by examination results. First, only students from years ten and eleven are selected, that is, when they are working towards their GCSE examinations. Second, only those who might underachieve in these exams are chosen. As Harry Hopkins explains:

"It could be somebody who simply isn't pulling their weight, or it could be - going to the other extreme - a nervous girl who needs an arm putting round her to move her along... Certainly the thrust was directed towards underachieving boys."

He goes on to outline the array of test results used to identify these potential underachievers:

"London Reading Test score on entry in year seven, NFER results in year eight, SATs in year nine, YELLIS scores in year ten."

The scores have come to represent the students. This seems a long way from the headteacher's aim to know individual students. The 'YELLIS' set of tests is particularly pertinent to the GCSE league tables. Its purpose is to predict results so that discrepancies between attainment and expectations can be quickly identified. A sixth form student, who had been assigned a mentor during year eleven, however, considered it a helpful scheme:

"It was just somebody you could go and talk to and make sure you were doing all right."

But other students were more cynical. It was seen as a device to push up the number of A-C grades at the school. The following comment was more typical:

"They just want you to get a C. If they think you'll only get a D or E then they don't bother."

This dissonance in the values held within Bowden School between *all* students being of equal worth and *some* students being worth more than *others*, both increases and reduces student participation. For those who are more likely to succeed academically greater opportunities to do so are offered. The mentoring scheme is one example. Another is the increasing number of classes grouped according to notions of student attainment. This emphasis on results however constructs students as failures as well as successes. If there is a 'top' set in a subject there must also be a 'bottom'. Pressure is also put on teachers to produce results, inevitably they too are assessed by the league tables. This in turn challenges the attitudes of staff towards teaching students whose

behaviour is at times demanding. The process of teaching and learning becomes secondary to the end product of raising national test and examinations results.

Interacting with the Local Education Community

This section focuses on how the cultures of Bowden School reflect and are shaped by its interactions within the local education community of Markston. I begin by considering its relationship with local secondary schools. This story shares a narrative thread with the previous section. The continuing hierarchy of Markston schools has strengthened collaborations between Bowden and some schools whilst increasing its rivalry with others. I then consider Bowden's relationships with its local primary schools: both their staff and students. I focus on the policies and practices regarding the transfer of students from years six to seven. I examine what they reveal about the cultures of Bowden School and the participation of new students before they even join the school. I end by considering the relationship between Bowden School and Markston Education Authority. I focus on the LEA's provision of student support services and argue that this has helped to shape the cultures of the school. These developments have been ambiguous in terms of increasing and/or reducing participation of students.

Competing and Collaborating with Secondary Schools

Journal extract: house meeting

There is much amusement because Bowden has knocked out the Cathedral School in the semi-finals of a regional quiz competition. Apparently they mistakenly put in a year eleven rather than year thirteen team as allowed. A teacher calls out: "So when they all become solicitors,

lawyers, Lord High Executioners we'll say to them, please, have you read the letter properly, before you cut off my head?" (ref: 1/10/hmt)

This incident, however entertaining, portrays the level of animosity felt at Bowden School towards some of the other schools in Markston, especially the Cathedral. Bowden does not expect its students to go on to powerful jobs such as being lawyers, let alone Lord High Executioners, but at least they can follow instructions. Beating the Cathedral School is as pleasing to some staff as winning the £1000 prize of computer equipment.

The promotion of competition between schools by successive governments has not only affected policies and practices within Bowden School but also inevitably its relationship with other Markston schools, for none can increase their student intake without reducing numbers elsewhere. This pitting of schools against one another has damaged their sense of belonging to a wider community, working together as part of a local education service. However, in Markston it is more complex than simply 'us' and 'them'. The Cathedral and the Manor, the two existing ex-grammar schools, have always kept a distance from the other schools. More recently a second and third division of schools have been created. The former comprise those which opted for Grant Maintained status (now called Foundation) and the latter comprise the six schools - including Bowden - which remain under the control of the local education authority.

The headteacher notes that there is some rivalry *between* GM and LEA schools but *maintains* that there is sense of collaboration *amongst* the latter group. He explains that they share similar concerns and interests.

"Those six secondary schools, to all intents and purposes, are catering for... the bottom fifty per cent of the social areas in Markston... but in our

terms we're on the brink of some very exciting developments because of the levels of trust involved."

This "trust" includes the six schools respecting each other's catchment areas by "working as a consortium" over student intake. David Roberts illustrates this by explaining that for a number of years the LEA schools have placed a single notice about Open Evenings in local papers so as to promote the schools equally and present a united front. In contrast, each of the GM schools places individual notices to attract new parents/carers and their children. However, whilst I was at Bowden School for the first time one of the LEA schools placed their own advertisement for Open Evening without consulting the other five schools. It seems that falling student numbers played a part in this decision. In 1999 this school's intake level was 215 but it was the first choice for only 122 parents/carers (57%). Perhaps loyalty amongst the six LEA schools is only supportable when none is threatened in this way.

This culture of local support may dissipate as the government initiative of 'fair funding' is further implemented in all schools. As David Roberts remarks:

"We fought the battle against GM for ten years and now we'll end up running GM schools by the back door. In name we'll be LEA but in responsibility we will be doing everything the GM schools do."

These cracks in the relationship between the local LEA schools, whatever their causes, can only be to the detriment of members of Bowden School. Staff and students have benefited from the exchange of ideas and material resources that working with other schools promotes, allowing them to participate in a wider educational community. Less tangible is the impact of this increasing isolation on the cultures of the individual school, such as Bowden.

Working with primary school staff and students

Relationships between Bowden and its local primary schools are qualitatively different from those formed with its local secondary schools. Contact is mainly concerned with the transfer of students from years six to seven. There is a common focus of collaboration rather than competition. At Bowden School a great deal of thought, time and effort is put into ensuring that the transition from primary to secondary education is a positive experience for students and informative for staff. These policies and practices reflect the core values of care and concern about individual students within the cultures of the school.

Mary Butler, one of the deputy headteachers, has overall responsibility for liaising with primary schools.

"We have a group of staff, from each department... and each member is linked with a primary school... We've looked at curriculum in the schools; transfer of information; the documents that the LEA has given us. We did a lot of research comparing how students and staff perceive their transfer. And then we did a teacher workshop at the end of last year."

All year seven classes are mixed attainment and much collaborative effort between Bowden and its feeder primary schools goes into the arrangement of these teaching groups. Mary Butler describes the final process:

"The groups are put together by Sandra Stephens after she has visited all primary schools, and gained information about social interactions, general behaviour and level of ability... You've obviously got to balance all that with helping learning and language support to put on the support that they need to."

Two 'primary days' are organised in the summer term: each one catering for about half the new intake. These require much preparation to ensure they are helpful for students and staff. Not only are the tutor and teaching groups decided in advance so that students can meet their future classmates but next

year's timetable is also prepared so that they may spend their primary day being taught by the same staff whom they will encounter the following September. Although these arrangements are mainly the responsibility of staff at Bowden School the cooperation of their primary colleagues is essential to encourage students to attend. Some primary staff also accompany those students who may need extra support on the day. Their principle intention is to make new students feel welcome.

Having the school's timetable ready by the end of June is a demanding task for Mary Butler and Harry Hopkins, the two deputy headteachers responsible for doing so. However, as Mary Butler explains:

"I have a strong philosophy about primary day... We put a lot of pressure on ourselves to have our timetable written... the reason being... I want the youngsters to not only to get a sample of lessons and to meet their house head, but also to actually meet the teachers they're having the following year... Staff also get an insight... It helps the teachers to understand what the group is going to be like... It's worth the effort because it has a huge effect... you know what your year sevens are going to be like when you plan your first lesson."

The learning support department also liaises closely with primary school colleagues. Sharon Houghton, second in department, coordinates this work. She visits schools to establish which year six students may benefit from additional support when they join Bowden School. Her preliminary list then contributes to information used by Sandra Stephens to form balanced teaching groups. Members of the learning support department are also involved in observing students during the two primary days.

Journal extract: learning support department meeting

Sharon Houghton gives each of us a timetable to show which lessons we are to observe; also a list of students' names with a table to complete for

comments. We are told to observe and not get involved in the lessons themselves... We are to watch all the students not just those with statements or those highlighted by the primary schools. (ref: 29/6/dmt)

Journal extract: primary day, technology lesson

For these students their introduction to technology is structured, friendly and calm. Ian Ware says to the class: 'If you don't know what to do ask me. I'm here to help you, I want you to learn. Don't be frightened'. Each student is given a booklet and the materials to make a key ring. With unnerving ease I identify Richard Mahoney, who has a statement of 'special educational needs'. Almost immediately he cracks the plastic he is given and looks tearful. By the end of the lesson he has, however, a completed key ring to take home.' (ref: 1/7/3)

Bowden School's interactions with its feeder primary schools are intended to increase the participation of new students in the life of the school. They set out to welcome, reassure and support; and in many ways they are successful. These policies and practices have developed out of deeply held values within the cultures of the school that each student should feel comfortable in the school. However, a contradictory set of beliefs coexists as revealed in the learning support departmental meeting following the primary days.

Journal extract: learning support departmental meeting

"We go through each of the primary day classes. Kelly Whitbread seems aggressively unpleasant. 'I'd kill him,' she says as she mimes strangling someone. This is Richard Mahoney whom I'd met in technology. I find it difficult to imagine it's the same boy. I wonder if he will be labelled as difficult and unpleasant before even starting. Linda Ripley discusses another student. 'Hayley is going to be the problem in that class. Cocky, nasty, little girl', to which Shirley Dunton replies, 'I wouldn't worry - if she's a Barker she won't ever be here.' Apparently her siblings truant frequently... Not one pleasant or sympathetic comment is made about any of the students. At the end of the meeting Sharon Houghton raises her eyes to the ceiling and asks: 'Sonia, where are you?' (Sonia Dormer works for the LEA's student counselling service.) (ref: 1/7/dmt)

This journal extract helps to illustrate the discriminatory attitudes of some staff towards individual students who are labelled and devalued. No one at the meeting considers how to support those who might truant, find it difficult to conform to expected behaviour, or whatever. Problems are presented as being inherent faults in the students: “cocky”, “nasty”. Murder is offered as a semi-humorous solution. Yet by making demons out of ten and eleven year old students, barriers are created to their participation even before they have formally joined Bowden School. And, this is amongst the members of staff from whom these students might expect to find the greatest tolerance and understanding.

Relationships with the Local Education Authority

Historically, Markston once formed part of Shire Education Authority. It was perceived as something of a poor relation, situated some miles away, geographically and symbolically, from the LEA’s main administrative centre. In 1998 Markston became a unitary authority, however this opportunity to play a key role in the development of education services in Markston’s schools has come too late. National legislation in the 1980s and 1990s had already weakened the powers of all LEAs.

Bowden School’s current relationship with this new LEA appears to have limited impact on the school’s cultures, policies or practices. As the headteacher explains: *“I don’t think Markston Education Authority has done very much to support us.”* The LEA’s main involvement with the school is the services it offers: for example, it has responsibility for administering the admission of students to all the LEA schools. However, the services which impact most clearly on the school are those directed at students who are considered to be in need of

additional support, such as counselling, educational psychology, behaviour support and multi-cultural education.

The nature of these support services were already shaped by the cultures of the Shire education authority of which Markston once formed a part. During the late 1980s and early 1990s the larger authority put policies into place which it hoped would lead to fewer demands for statutory assessments and a reduction in the number of students in special schools. For one project, established in 1987, a budget of £¾ million a year was made available to increase the number of support teachers in mainstream schools¹. In 1986 the LEA closed a special school in Markston for students categorised as having 'moderate learning difficulties' and funded its students, through an "enhanced resources" scheme, to attend one of two designated mainstream schools. Bowden School was one of these. Seven students continue to be admitted in each year group. They all live in Markston but Bowden is not necessarily their local school.

The impact of these students on the cultures of the school is difficult to assess. Even after working at Bowden I did not know for sure which thirty-five students were part of this scheme. They were fully integrated in school life and there were other students who might be considered equally in need of support. However, Bowden's status as a 'designated school' has reinforced its reputation with parents and the LEA as being particularly competent at working with students described as experiencing learning difficulties. This in turn has strengthened notions of difference between it and other Markston secondary schools. At one extreme there is the Cathedral School, known for excelling at developing students' academic and musical talents. At the other, there is

¹ At the end of Chapter Four, *Autobiographical Tales*, I explain that I was seconded from my teaching job to research an LEA funded project. This was the scheme.

Bowden School, which is highly regarded because of its specialist experience of working with students considered to have 'learning' and 'behaviour difficulties'.

Philip Cleary, the head of the learning support department, describes the school as a "*magnet*" for students with 'special educational needs' and the department as a "*victim of our own success*". He argues that he is "*constantly under attack*" from the LEA to take on more and more students who are not welcomed by other schools and perceives this as damaging to the "*balance*" at Bowden School. Philip Cleary's insistence on "*balance*" is particularly important when students who are perceived as having challenging behaviour are involved. Such students are generally the least welcome by staff at Bowden School as well as the most difficult for the LEA to place. Recently a special school, for students designated as have emotional and behavioural difficulties, has closed following a highly critical Ofsted inspection and later allegations of abuse by staff. This school is only a mile or so from Bowden. According to Philip Cleary this puts his department under increased pressure from the LEA to accept students who have been excluded from other mainstream schools who would previously have attended the special school. These are frustrating and time-consuming aspects of his work which he describes in militaristic terms of "*fighting the authority*".

The LEA's provision of support services is therefore of ambiguous benefit to Bowden School and, in particular, its learning support department. Philip Cleary views the authority as an essential source of funding to help him to support students in the school. However, he has to balance the advantage of extra resources against the perceived 'costs' of placing additional students in the school. Philip Cleary wants to "*give students a chance*", although...

"At times I feel really guilty about taking another student with learning difficulties to add to the ones we've already got because - it's all right for

me sitting up here in my palace - but it's the teacher in the classroom who's got to manage them as well."

Bowden's relationship with Markston Education Authority is therefore based on cautious negotiations. Higher levels of LEA resources certainly provide Philip Cleary with a more flexibility approach to supporting students and therefore greater opportunities to increase their learning and participation. The acceptance of students at Bowden School, who would otherwise be sent to special schools, allows their participation in mainstream education. At the same time, the pressure exerted on the school by the LEA, to take more students from outside its catchment area because of perceived learning and/or behavioural difficulties has further unbalanced an already skewed intake. Within the cultures of the school this legitimises teachers' primary concern with control in the classroom and their lowered expectation of students. Such perceptions create barriers to the learning and participation of all.

Ghosts in the Classrooms: Students

This section examines ways in which the cultures of Bowden School interact with students' private worlds, families, friends and neighbourhoods: their *"ghosts in the classroom"*. I begin by exploring some of the policies and practices in the school which allow staff to find out about students' external worlds and their impact upon student participation. I then focus on two particular sets of policies to reveal ways in which some students' ghosts are ignored, misunderstood or feared. First, I examine student admissions to Bowden School. I explore ambiguities within staff's beliefs about a comprehensive system in which some students are less welcomed than others. Second, I consider the success and limitation of the language support team to promote

the external worlds of students from a range of ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Through these I argue that within the cultures of the school some students are perceived of as 'other', or as 'them' rather than 'us': doing so creates barriers to their participation in the life of Bowden School.

Getting to know students' ghosts

On the first day of the new school year, Michael Mitchell, head of house, made the following comment to his pastoral team:

"We need to remember that for most kids we are only a very small part of their real world... What matters to them are family, friends, home and hobbies ... But also many will be pleased to see us... Six weeks' holiday may not have been peaceful and fun but tense and uncertain. We have to... provide support for these children."

This not only acknowledges the importance to students of their lives outside school but also how their external worlds are brought into Bowden everyday. Michael Mitchell emphasises the pastoral role of staff in supporting students especially when those external worlds are *"tense and uncertain"*.

David Roberts, the headteacher, also highlights the value the school places on getting to know students.

"Our aims are very aspirational: to treat every child as an individual in a school of nearly fourteen hundred. And if we ever achieve that, then that is pretty good."

There are a number of policies in Bowden School that support this aim: some are more successfully put into practice than others. For example, the school is particularly efficient at keeping staff informed about major events in students' lives: crises and, less frequently, celebrations. This information is shared with all staff, with the intention of engaging their sympathy with students in times of

stress. Staff briefing and house meetings are used to report such occurrences and provide daily updates. The following journal extracts provides a brief glimpse into the lives of some students.

Journal extracts: staff meetings

Mrs Simons has rung to say that a student called Stuart is bullying her son, Eddy. This is complicated further because Mr Simons is now living with Stuart's mother and they are shortly to be married. (ref: 1/10/hmt)

Ben has been absent from school. His mother is ill and he has overheard her say that she wishes she were dead. He can't talk to her about his fears because he doesn't want to worry her. (ref: 10/6/dmt)

Adam is returning to school today following a fixed-term exclusion because of a bullying incident. His father, who had been in a coma for some time, died last week. (ref: 22/6/bmt)

It is important that members of staff are given these insights into students' external worlds. For example, it is inconceivable that Adam should go to any lesson in which the teacher does not know that his father has recently died. Ensuring that this happens shows respect and care for individuals' lives. However, whilst this is to be commended it is not the same as the headteacher's aspiration of *"treating every child as an individual"*. Most students do not experience such horrifying events. Getting to know *all* students is also about finding out about the everyday aspects of their lives outside school. For some students, like Amy from Chapter Five, these may still be difficult and sad at times. One teacher described this to me:

"When you get a class of twenty-five children you don't always appreciate what baggage they are bringing into it... that they might have had a really bad time at home and they're coming to your lesson thinking, 'Don't give me any grief'. So if you can try and see the other side of the coin it makes you a little bit more understanding."

For many students at Bowden School their experiences outside school are less stressful than those of Amy, or the students in the journal extracts above. However, this does not negate the importance of their home, family and friends to them as individuals. In Bowden School the form tutor is given responsibility for sustaining these connections between the worlds inside and outside school. For some staff it is an especially satisfying aspect of their work. However, in practice once again the emphasis is on those students in particular need of support. As one teacher explained: *"Form tutors haven't got the time to listen to every kid"*.

Similarly, in classrooms, the *ghosts* of some students remain unnoticed. And, even when form tutors are well informed about their tutees, they do not necessarily share this knowledge and understanding with teaching and support staff. No tutor asked me about a student with whom I worked or passed on information to me about one. As an LSA I found out about those students with whom I worked most closely by talking to them. However, this is less easy for a classroom teacher who does not spend her time sitting alongside only two or three students in each lesson. I also read student records kept in the learning support department office. However, I never observed any staff outside the department using these documents. Teachers with whom I worked never asked me about a student's background: what I did find out was therefore not easily shared with others. And, anyway, these students once again represented a small proportion of the total number at the school.

In these ways the external worlds of the majority of students remain largely hidden. Members of staff insist that they want to have more time to spend with all students and members of the senior management team reiterate the importance of getting to know students. Yet, however strongly these views are

articulated they do not seem to influence practices in the school. Lack of time is given as the reason for this, but choices about how resources are used in the school reveal its priorities. To bring about a genuine shift in these, it would be necessary to acknowledge and value each student as an individual person, including their experiences outside school. Amy Hudson's stories, from Chapter Five, help to illustrate these differences. The science teacher approached students with prejudice, ignorance and fear; as 'them' rather than 'us'. These attitudes formed barriers to the participation not only of Amy but also of others in the lesson. In contrast the history teacher's relationship with all her students was based on knowledge of them as individuals to be treated with tolerance, respect and compassion.

Admissions policies and practices

Bowden School's admissions policy emphasises that it is a school for local families. Its intention is to welcome all students, as shown in its admissions criteria in Figure 6:2.

Figure 6:2 Admissions criteria for Bowden School

Intake level of 240 places:

1. Verified medical need relating to the pupil.
2. Brother or sister on the school roll.
3. Up to seven places for pupils with moderate learning difficulties who have special educational needs which require the additional resources that are available to the school.
4. Children living closest to the school.

These are in stark contrast to the criteria used to select students by some other schools in Markston, such as the Cathedral School, discussed earlier in this

chapter and shown in Figure 6:1. This emphasis on the comprehensive status of the school is illustrated in the opening paragraph of Bowden School's prospectus for parents/carers, which states: *"We are truly comprehensive, taking students from a variety of backgrounds."* This is reiterated in the governing body's statement of aims:

"The curriculum should cater positively for all abilities in this comprehensive school, allowing each student to achieve his or her personal best."
(Staff Handbook)

In each interview with staff I asked what their views were on Bowden being a comprehensive. Every one spoke with pride about the school's willingness and ability to work with all students. The comprehensive ideal appeared to be firmly established within the cultures of the school, having an almost mythological status. However, further questioning revealed that their conceptualisation of a comprehensive school was not one that admitted *all* students. Each member of staff was able to identify categories of students who should not be included at Bowden even if as individuals they lived in its local communities. These contradictory beliefs were based on the conviction that some students are beyond the boundaries of 'normal' and therefore it is appropriate that they are educated elsewhere. These beliefs are reflected in the school's admissions practices. For example, I asked about students who are wheelchair users. Whilst the headteacher said, *"It wouldn't be easy with the staircases... but there are always ways round"*, other staff strongly disagreed. Philip Cleary, head of the learning support department argued, *"People with physical difficulties would be a problem... this is not the school for them... It would be impossible."* One of the deputy headteachers dismissed the idea by saying, *"This site won't cater for them, it's no use"*. Similar reactions were also given to the idea that the school might admit students who are deaf or blind. Staff expressed no concern about

excluding any of these students from participating in their neighbourhood school.

Within the staff's concept of a comprehensive system there is still a role for 'special' schools. Philip Cleary argues this unquestioningly.

"There are obviously students who need to be in special schools... I don't think that's an issue in anybody's eyes."

Students, perceived as having particularly challenging behaviour, were viewed differently from those with physical disabilities. Whereas the latter group should/could not be admitted to Bowden School at all, students with 'behavioural difficulties' could be, albeit conditionally. If they did not conform to acceptable ways of behaving then they would have to leave and go to a 'special' school or unit. As Mary Butler, deputy headteacher, explains: *"If this school won't work, no school will"*. This belief was reiterated by every member of staff to whom I spoke. There is great pride in the superior ability of the school to support students who are considered to be 'difficult': *"If we weren't able to deal with them, well who could?"* However, this implies that some students are not educable within any comprehensive school; they are outside the boundaries of 'normality'. Some staff express sympathy explaining that *"horrendous family lives"* contribute to students' problems; or that some students have *"huge, genuine, complex behavioural problems"* to distinguish them from merely *"naughty kids"*. Nevertheless, their compassion is limited: the support and understanding that these students may need is not available from staff at Bowden School.

Philip Cleary expands on the conditional nature of admittance to the school:

"There is a balance... not only what can the school do for the child but what can the child... offer the school. If that child is going to be a drain on

resources and that drain isn't matched by extra resources coming in then we have to think twice because of the students already here."

Again this reveals that staff do not believe that all students have an equal right to attend Bowden School. Students who are identified as being "a drain on resources" are not as valued as those whom the school is particularly anxious to attract and as referred to by the headteacher as "our top end". Even before starting at Bowden the ghosts of some students are more welcome to participate than others.

Promoting diversity: the role of the language support team

Far from ignoring or devaluing the external worlds of students, the policy of the language support team at Bowden School sets out to recognise and promote the diversity of experiences of students from a range of ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. This aim is described in the *Staff Handbook* as:

"Promoting the value of the linguistic and cultural diversity of students within this [school]. Language support promotes bilingual students as a positive resource in a multi-ethnic school such as Bowden."

I asked the head of the team, Eleanor Wharton, to give me some practical examples of how members of her team have attempted to fulfil this aim.

"Certain areas of the school are easier than others, like art and music, because they study different styles and artists and the students can make an input about what they know and their own experiences. Other parts of the curriculum are not so easy to fit in some aspect of culture, like in science, although we have bilingual signs in the labs and now and again when a teacher mentions scientists they can pick out someone from an ethnic minority."

Despite these intentions, I observed little evidence of the above. Eleanor Wharton refers specifically to inputs made during art, music and science

lessons. I can not comment on art, as I only observed one lesson whilst at Bowden School. However, I worked alongside two music teachers for twenty-six lessons, with years seven and eight, covering both practical and theoretical aspects of the subject and I did not note any reference to musical styles, musicians or composers outside Europe and North America. Likewise in science, in which I supported six teachers over forty-one lessons, with years seven, eight, ten and eleven, there was no mention made of any contribution to scientific enquiry by people outside countries of the north. There were bilingual signs on the walls of about half the laboratories in which I worked although I was not aware of staff or students using them.

Eleanor Wharton explained that she also supports staff to be better informed about the external worlds of some students.

"Not all staff are aware of the different cultures in the school. We have a booklet for staff about some of the communities represented at Bowden."

This booklet is informative and useful. It outlines some of the languages, customs and traditions (e.g. diet, festivals, naming systems) of Markston's Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, East African Asian, African-Caribbean, Italian and Polish communities. However, I had not seen a copy of it until the interview with Eleanor Wharton took place some six months after I had started working at Bowden School. It had not supported my understanding of students' external lives.

I asked Eleanor Wharton for some more examples of the team's work:

"Sofia [language support assistant] has done an activity in food technology where she made chapattis... We have an Eid party [Muslim festival] every year because our biggest group is Pakistani Muslims. That's open to every one. When we had a Health and Fun Day we ran an activity on hand painting that was attended by a lot of people... It's a difficult one... I can't think of anything else."

Each of these shows an intention to value the contribution that some students' external lives can bring to the school. However, there seems to be a lack of drive to ensure implementation in practice. The activities described, like the annual Eid party, are on the periphery of school life rather than central to teaching and learning experiences. Eleanor Wharton explained that *"We have to approach teachers with ideas more than they approach us."* This reflects the attitudes of staff generally towards acknowledging and understanding the diversity of many of the students.

Eleanor Wharton was insistent that racism amongst students is something which *"staff really clamp down on"* at Bowden School. This is strongly reflected in the school's formal policy documents. However, she argued that *"ignorance"* about differences does cause problems.

"Somebody recently touched a Sikh's bun. And some students have pulled the scarves worn by Muslim girls and called them tea towels. Things like that. They don't fully understand the reason behind them."

I also asked about racism between students and staff and she offered the following story:

"The Muslim boys are usually very polite towards staff. The only place we've had trouble is the canteen. They aren't used to clearing up after themselves. And so we have problems with them leaving a mess. They do clear up, once the teachers on duty tell them. But they have got a very bad reputation in the canteen... so the dinner ladies don't treat them very well."

Eleanor Wharton maintains that staff at Bowden School, other than those working in the canteen in the story above, do not exhibit racist attitudes towards students. Whilst I did not observe any overt prejudice directed at students by staff, racism is part of the school's cultures. Such attitudes

(mis)inform the understanding of some staff about the external worlds of some students. The following two extracts from my journal help to illustrate these points.

Journal extract: reading the school's prospectus

There are five photographs of the school. The boys nearly all have blond hair and the girls have neat ponytails. I count twenty-two white students plus one Asian girl. However, I did not notice her at first as she is shown at long-distance. There are no other ethnic groups represented. These pictures do not look like the students I see at Bowden School.

(ref: 19/9/en)

Journal extract: between lessons

After science, Muriel Hammond (an LSA) and I wait for the rush of students on the stairs to clear before we go down. As we watch them leaving, she says, "You wonder if some of them are really human". I mutter in a non-committal way. Muriel replies that together they can be "awful" and then adds "particularly the Asian boys" and explains to me that they often swear in their own language so staff can't punish them.

(ref: 19/9/3)

The stories in this section highlight how life outside school impacts on students' experiences within. The customs and habits of different external worlds – for example, dress codes and differing expectations about the behaviours of male and female students - reveal misunderstandings, ignorance and sometimes prejudice by both students and staff. However, these tales illustrate not only some of the difficulties encountered specifically by Muslim students, they are also indicative of the complexities faced by any student at Bowden School whose life beyond the school gate is not easily comprehended by those within.

In the final story the LSA creates two categories: 'us' (human being/members of staff) and 'them' (non-human/students). From the latter she forms a further

sub-division of "*Asian boys*" whom she criticises for speaking to one another in their first language, 'although 'we' the 'humans' do so all the time. Such attitudes in Bowden School, however unthinkingly expressed, contribute to cultures in which barriers to participation are formed to the detriment of teaching and learning.

Ghosts in the Classrooms: Staff

This final section of the chapter considers the *ghosts* which members of staff bring into Bowden School. I begin by drawing together the external worlds of staff and students to identify ways in which connections between them may break down barriers, whilst differences may create them. For the former I focus on the involvement of staff in the local neighbourhoods; for the latter I consider the ethnicity of staff and students. I then explore ghosts brought into Bowden by staff from other schools in which they have either been a student themselves or worked as a teacher. I examine ways in which these past experiences shape current understandings of teaching and learning within the cultures of the school. I end by considering how far the private worlds of staff are welcomed into the school. I reflect on the importance of social aspects of teaching as a means to break down barriers between different groups of staff as well as to provide professional and personal support.

Connecting with students' ghosts

The attitude of Muriel Hammond towards students, and specifically Asian boys, is part of who she is as a person and not just as an LSA. It is drawn from her beliefs, misunderstandings and prejudices developed over time both inside and

outside Bowden School. It is also an element of the ghost she brings to the classrooms in which she works. She is Irish and talks with pride of her background: she does not associate ambiguities in her regard for one cultural heritage with her dismissal of others. She is unable to make connections with their external worlds.

The ghosts of staff are always present in Bowden School, modifying and being modified by its cultures. Connections between the external worlds of staff and students can help to break down barriers between them and encourage students to feel more welcome in the school. For example, a number of staff, including the headteacher, live in Bowden's local catchment area and know some of its communities well. They are neighbours of students' families: they use the same shops, pubs and garages. Teachers like Sandra Stephens and support staff like Joanna York have grown up in the area. Both had siblings who attended Bowden School as students. The children of some members of staff attend Bowden School and/or its local feeder primary schools. Although other staff do not choose Bowden School, even though they live near by, and this is a cause of resentment amongst some staff.

Other connections between staff and students' external worlds are less well established. Whilst eight per cent of students are from ethnic minority groups only three members of staff are non-European and only one of these, a science teacher, works full-time and with all students. The other two are marginalised from the mainstream of teaching and learning in the school. Mohammed Raqib teaches Urdu part-time to students who are predominantly from Pakistani backgrounds. Sofia Begum is a part-time language support assistant who works mainly with Punjabi speaking students.

Ghosts from other schools

Members of staff bring into school their previous educational experiences, from when they were students in a school as well as from previous teaching jobs. When I interviewed staff it was interesting to note how often they answered questions by comparing Bowden to other schools they knew well. These earlier understandings shape their current beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning and their notion of a 'good' teacher. When I asked Carol Marina (LSA) to describe her first impressions of Bowden School she does so by comparing it with the school she went to as a girl some twenty years ago.

"Until I came here last year I didn't quite believe how people behave in schools these days. When I was at school it was very hard discipline. It was a girls' school and you had to stand up every time a teacher entered the room. I knew [Bowden] wouldn't be like that. But I just didn't believe the way some students speak to the teachers and the language they use. And unfortunately it's allowed to go on."

The values expressed in these criticisms continue to inform her working life at Bowden School. She prefers to work with teaching colleagues in whose lessons students are quiet and controlled. She has limited sympathy for teachers who experience discipline problems. When I asked her about this aspect of her work she drew on another element of her external worlds: of being a parent. *"If my daughter was in her class, I wouldn't be very pleased"*.

Teachers draw on their professional experiences of other schools to make sense of their work at Bowden. These can both increase opportunities for students' participation through widening the professional knowledge and expertise available in the school, as well as create barriers to students' participation by limiting opportunities for innovative thinking. Either way they influence decisions about policies and practices in the school. When I asked Laura Clark about the lack of group work in music teaching at Bowden School she justified

the approach used by comparing it with how music was taught in another school in which she had worked.

"I probably didn't agree when I arrived here. But I think if you are sending children off into practice rooms with drums and the like... I think Guy [head of department] has a valid point. I wouldn't trust them not to mess around... They could just pull something together in the final three minutes of a session. I've done it, I've worked like that."

Laura Clark's understanding of teaching and learning has been shaped by the existing cultures in the school in which many lessons are taught in near silence and with little contact between students because teachers can not *"trust them not to mess around"*. In the music department all three teachers work in an identical way. There is very little opportunity for students to work collaboratively on singing or instrumental work; a critique of this approach to lessons is provided in Chapter Eight. Despite her initial reluctance she has partly justified this approach by comparing it with difficulties she has experienced in the past.

Other teachers make use of previous professional knowledge and understanding to bring about changes in Bowden School. David Roberts had already been a headteacher at another school before he came to Bowden and this work informed some of his decisions about his new school. Mary Butler had worked in a learning support department elsewhere and brought from there the reading scheme currently used at Bowden School. When I asked her to describe it to me, she first told its history:

I worked in an inner city Coventry school. The youngsters there were very difficult. A couple went off to special school... and we had a significant number who were second language students... The progress we made with them was so phenomenal... that's why I brought it here. I have never come across a scheme that has such dramatic effects on students."

Mary Butler has not only introduced the reading scheme into Bowden School but has also brought her sense of herself as a successful professional who can make a difference to students' learning.

Private ghosts

Staff not only carry their professional *ghosts* into work; like students they also bring their private *ghosts* into Bowden School. For example, within the learning support department, break times are spent discussing children, marriages, homes and other outside interests and concerns. As with students' external worlds, personal crises are responded to with sympathy and tolerance. But even mundane events – car break downs or new shoes – are discussed. This interest in one another's external worlds is valued within the cultures of the school. All staff I interviewed stressed the friendliness of their colleagues and the importance of this to help them to cope with the day-to-day stresses of working in a school.

The social lives of staff cross boundaries of being internal and external to the school. Staff arrange social events outside school, such as the Christmas dinner and nightclub outing I went on with the learning support department. Other more private friendships also exist beyond the school gates: visiting one another's homes; going on holidays; visiting pubs and clubs; embarking on sexual relationships. Collectively these interchanges and ensuing friendships have informed and shaped the cultures of Bowden School. They help to break down professional barriers: between members of different departments; experienced and newly qualified teachers; teaching and non-teaching staff; teachers and members of the senior management team.

Interactions between professional and personal ghosts also occur when staff take home their work, literally and emotionally. It is not always easy for staff to keep these two worlds separate. During term time, particularly, there is an expectation within the school that staff should work long hours. Being exhausted is part of belonging to the cultures of the school. I asked Philip Cleary what strategies he employed when his work seemed stressful. He explained that he relied on support from Sharon Houghton, his second in department.

"[She] helps a great deal. There have been times when she and I have been on the phone for two or three hours of an evening mulling over the day and having a go at this, that and the other."

Whilst this must be supportive it is interesting to speculate the impact such lengthy phone calls have on their families. LSAs describe how their partners complain when they bring home marking, or whatever, particularly as they are not paid to work extra hours. These interactions with the external worlds of staff cause resentments at home and at school, creating barriers to their participation in both.

Some Reflections on Interacting with External Worlds

As I write two events have recently taken place which demonstrate how external worlds affect the lives of students and staff at Bowden School. One is political in nature the other more personal. The first is the bombing of the Twin Towers in New York. The global consequences of this are frightening, unclear and possibly immense. As a small part of this, relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in and around Bowden School will have been challenged. The second event is the accidental death of a girl caused by the inhalation of

lighter fuel. She was a student at Bowden School. The coverage on local television news included film of her distressed friends comforting each other outside the school.

These incidents demonstrate that the cultures of a school are embedded in its external worlds and its external worlds are embedded in its cultures. In very different ways, the bombing in America and the death of a student will challenge, modify and entrench existing values within Bowden School, as well as perceptions held of it by those outside of its gates. Both the spontaneous and the planned responses of students and staff to these events will be shaped by the school's cultures. These in turn will impact upon the participation of students and staff in the life of their school. To return to the quotation at the beginning of the chapter: *"The public and the private can never be disentangled"*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES OF A SCHOOL¹

“Systems and roles which dominate our educational arrangements socialise and institutionalise us into ways of seeing and behaving which tend too often to mark a retreat from the personal”.

(Fielding, 1998, p.90)

The cultures of Bowden School both reflect and are modified by its institutional structures, including those which are concerned with the organisation and management of relationships between members of the school. Herein lies a paradox, which Fielding notes: the very structures which set out to “socialise and institutionalise” staff and students can also damage that which is “personal” in their relationships. In this chapter I examine processes which support the development of participatory relationships as well as processes that act as barriers to their formation. I consider notions of identity and belonging, as well as status, power and control, so as to explore how, within relationships, individuals and groups are valued and devalued.

Relationships amongst Staff

In this section I examine the formal organisation of staffing within Bowden School. First, I consider the hierarchical structure of the senior management team by exploring how its position of power is managed within the cultures of the school. I argue that the relationships between its members and other staff

¹ This chapter draws on an earlier paper: Black-Hawkins (1999)

are shaped by mutual respect as demonstrated by the participatory nature of decision-making in the school. Differences in status are also diffused through everyday professional interactions, based on notions of approachability, accessibility and support. I then focus on the learning support department so as to explore relationships within the departmental structures of the school. I consider its internal hierarchical structure and, in particular, the differences in status between its teaching and non-teaching staff. I end this section by examining inter-departmental relationships between classroom teachers and LSAs. I draw on my own experiences and those of other LSAs to illustrate that there is a lack of clarity about how these relationships should be managed within the institutional structures of the school, leaving LSAs vulnerable to abuses of power.

Management hierarchies

In Chapter Five, I referred to changes, introduced by the headteacher, to the management structures of Bowden School. He had increased the number of staff involved in the senior management and pastoral teams so as to create a broader base for both. However, the senior management team, in particular, remains essentially an hierarchical system, in terms of its position in the school and its own internal organisation. Harry Hopkins, deputy headteacher, explains:

"We have David [Roberts] as the head, Dale [Morris] as the first deputy... then Mary Butler and myself, on an even footing, as the other two deputies... And then we have four assistant deputies, all on an even footing."

The next layer in this management structure is heads of faculties/departments and, running parallel to that, the pastoral team of heads of houses. Each

member of the SMT is also linked to two or three faculties and one of the houses. Their role is intended to be both supervisory and supportive. So, for example, Harry Hopkins has links with expressive arts and physical education as well as 'B' house. Like all members of the SMT he also has a number of other whole school duties. For him these are largely related to his major role as key stage four coordinator: curriculum, internal and external examinations, student mentoring, parents' evenings, admissions and so forth. In addition, he has various other responsibilities ranging from ground maintenance to community police.

Even this partial description of Harry Hopkins' role as deputy headteacher suggests that the formal relationship between members of the SMT and other staff is based on notions of care and control by the former over the latter. Figure 7:1 provides an additional list of SMT responsibilities, which involve its members overseeing the day-to-day practices of other staff. Together with the SMT's curriculum and pastoral links these touch on almost every aspect of a member of staff's work at the school. For example, the everyday experiences of a teacher are shaped by timetabling decisions, available funding for teaching and learning resources, opportunities for professional review and development and possibilities for promotions.

Although these formal structures seem to encourage relationships between members of the SMT and other staff in which the former are able to exert power over the latter, this is not how they are played out within the practices of the school. Relationships appear to be based on *mutual* respect. I heard few comments about, or criticisms of, the SMT to suggest that they are seen as part of a top-down hierarchy, separated from the rest of the staff. When I asked the head of the learning support department about working with one of the deputy

headteachers as a member of his department, he explained, “We shake off those tags”.

Figure 7:1 Senior management team’s responsibilities for Bowden School staff

- Financial planning and budget
- Staff development
- Inservice training
- Professional review
- Induction of new staff
- Head of department / house training
- Personnel
- Disciplinary process
- Timetable
- Cover

(Extracts from the *Staff Handbook*)

The breaking down of distinctions of rank is partly because, within the cultures of the school, there is a strong belief in the participatory nature of decision-making. Members of the SMT have a supervisory role in terms of ensuring policies are put into practice, but policy decisions are reached by consensus across a wider range of staff. For example, when the deputy headteachers, Mary Butler and Harry Hopkins, construct the yearly timetable, they first consult with heads of faculties and departments, who in turn discuss with individual subject teachers which classes they wish to teach. Also, departments decide amongst themselves whether they wish to set students by attainment or to teach mixed attainment classes. However, heads of departments/faculties may then be autocratic about decision making at this level.

Mary Butler, one of the deputy headteachers, gives another example of consensus decision-making:

"A few years ago, Bowden teachers made a decision as a group of people to cut our non-contact time in order to reduce class sizes quite dramatically. Now we've got the highest contact ratio in Markston... Staff have probably each got an extra class, and therefore even though they're smaller classes they actually teach more children in the end. But that was a decision that Bowden staff made."

The policy decision to increase the contact ratio of teaching staff was not imposed by the SMT, but reached by agreement across a range of teaching staff. By participating in decision-making in this way staff are able to make choices and take control of their practice although this in turn makes extra demands on them.

Another important element of the participatory nature of these relationships is the accessibility of members of the senior management team. For example, I found those whom I approached readily available and willing to help me both as a LSA and in terms of my research. In briefing meetings I observed many instances of gentle leg pulling between staff at all levels. Sometimes gags would run for days on end and members of the SMT were as likely to be the recipients of these jokes as they were to be the instigators. Their formal status is balanced by other more informal professional relationships, based on mutual regard and respect. Joanna York, who is an LSA and a parent, describes the headteacher as follows:

"I find David very approachable... Yet, because he's right at the very top of the hierarchy, if he was going to be a bit aloof you might perhaps forgive him."

As part of this accessibility, members of the SMT are also a clearly visible presence in the school, particularly at the beginning and end of the school day and at break times. For example, I frequently came across the headteacher chatting informally to students and colleagues. I bumped into him in the

canteen buying lunch, in the playground watching boys kick around a ball, and at the end of the day checking the behaviour of students as they poured out into the streets. Indeed, the group of sixth form students whom I interviewed remarked upon his omnipresence:

"He seems to get into our lessons."

"Yeah, he's more... around."

"More active."

"He sort of pops up in corridors."

"Yeah." (All laugh)

When I interviewed him, he explained that, *"My way of being a head is to get around the place to see what is going on"*.

I experienced this sense of almost panoptic vision myself one day whilst covering an English workshop for a colleague.

Journal extract: English lesson year nine

I turn round to find David Roberts standing in the room. I nearly jump out of my skin. I feel ridiculously relieved that the lesson is calm... He asks me how everything is going, thanks me for my help, and disappears again.

(ref: 19/10/2)

Earlier that morning I had given him a letter asking if I might interview staff when I finished working as an LSA. So, despite being unnerved by his sudden appearance, I was impressed that he had come to speak to me personally and so promptly. It must have taken some effort to find me since I was not timetabled to be with these students or in this particular room. It was a one-off arrangement for that day. There is an element of surveillance in such actions, checking on staff and students – seeing *"what is going on"*. However, as this story reveals, his presence and approachability also help staff to feel valued.

The importance of the supportive nature of the relationships between the SMT and other staff was reiterated in interviews. Members of the SMT were typically

described as being “friendly”, “helpful” and “very good to me”. Within the cultures of Bowden School these qualities are highly valued amongst all staff and regardless of their position in the formal structures of the school. As the head of the learning support department pointed out to me on my first day, working at Bowden School is “tough” and in this context supporting colleagues is considered essential. Whilst the formal job descriptions for members of the SMT includes monitoring the work of other staff, informally their relationships are less regulatory and more advisory. As Laura Clark, one of the heads of houses, explains:

“I have a senior management link with Mary Butler. She’s been brilliant. Just really there for me, really supportive, encouraging. There have been issues when I’ve thought I don’t know what to do here... So I’ve asked Mary. Or sometimes it’s been Harry as key stage four coordinator. And they’ve advised me.”

Departmental structures

Like other departments/faculties at Bowden School, the overt structure of the learning support department is an hierarchical one. Philip Cleary is at its head, with Sharon Houghton as his second in department. They are followed by two learning support teachers and then below them are ten learning support assistants. One’s position in this hierarchy is related to responsibilities for and power over others in the school and is also reflected in the salary one earns. Philip Cleary is paid considerably more than the LSAs.

Apart from the responsibilities he has towards students, their families and outside agencies, Philip Cleary also has to oversee the department as a unit by organising timetables, allocating jobs, chairing meetings, encouraging, cajoling and, at times, reprimanding its other members. He describes his role as the “leader” of the department. He considers this necessary because:

"Sometimes the individuals within the team are insecure. They need somebody to tell them what to do. They need lots of guidance and, even the ones who are experienced, still need someone to turn to when a kid is causing them a problem."

During my months at the school I frequently overheard Philip Cleary taking on the role he describes above. When I asked for advice about particular students he was helpful and thorough in his responses. I rarely heard him criticised by his departmental colleagues. They perceive his job as being difficult and stressful and describe him as hard working: *"He's got too much to do, and he's too busy"*. They do not seem to envy his position.

It is not easy to distinguish between learning support teachers (LSTs) and learning support assistants (LSAs) in terms of their timetabled responsibilities although the former teach between four and six mainstream lessons during the course of a week. Both spend the majority of their time supporting students in mainstream lessons and running reading or mathematics workshops. However, Philip Cleary makes the following points:

"There are major differences between LSAs and LSTs in terms of responsibilities. I won't allow LSAs to be in classrooms on their own for more than two or three minutes. I won't allow them to take big groups... The school uses LSTs for form tutors, for mainstream teaching, parents' evenings, all sorts of things... But more than that, they have responsibility to carry out the law – the Code of Practice – annual reviews, case conferences... You could argue: do we need four LSTs, when one LST's salary could fund three LSAs? But there'd be more workload on our shoulders and therefore we'd have to have more time off timetable. Our job would become purely administrative and we'd lose touch with the children."

As Philip Cleary argues, within the institutional structures of the school, the LSTs have a necessary role to play. However, so do the LSAs. What Philip Cleary

does not address is why the former are considered to be worth financially approximately three times the value of the latter.

This poor pay offends the LSAs. They consider it symbolic of the low status their work is given.

"It's really poor pay for what we do... You don't do it particularly for the money. You could get a lot more in other jobs... I just feel it's unfortunate that we're not recognised as much as we should be." (Jane Lee, LSA)

These views are repeated again and again by her LSA colleagues. They accept that their wages are determined by national and local governments. They do not hold the school responsible but this makes them feel powerless to effect change. To counterbalance their dissatisfaction they have formed supportive relationships amongst themselves as a group so as to reinforce the value of each other's work. This sense of self worth is strengthened by their actual numbers in the department: accounting for ten out of a total of fifteen staff, they consider themselves to be its mainstay. They emphasise their pride in the job they do. Some have completed the City and Guilds LSA foundation course in their own time, with Bowden School covering the costs of the fees. They want to be competent at their work. Carol Marina explains:

"I'm doing the advanced course this year because I want to know more. I want to improve. There's no way they'll pay you extra for it, there's no supplement, no increment, nothing. It's not that I just want to be paid more, I want to be acknowledged."

This desire to be 'acknowledged', and its association with pay, is recognised by Philip Cleary. He uses his position in the school to negotiate the inclusion of the LSAs into the institutional structures of the school. They are members of houses and have links with other departments; they attend staff meetings and in-service training days and are paid to do so. Within the narrower context of

the department, Philip Cleary also takes great efforts to make the LSAs feel valued. At every departmental meeting I attended he thanked them for their hard work and support. He provides them with opportunities to develop their own particular skills and talents and so helps to increase their sense of self-worth. Carol Marina compares her job with that of LSAs elsewhere:

"From my course I know there are LSAs who do not get given the information which we do. They don't have access, they don't attend meetings, they're not invited."

Thus a curious ambiguity has arisen. The LSAs consider themselves poorly paid for the work they do. Philip Cleary rightly recognises that this undermines their sense of self-worth. To mitigate this he has given them the opportunity to take on greater responsibility in their jobs, which on the whole they appreciate. The result is that they work even harder, taking on greater responsibilities and putting in longer hours, and still for no extra money.

Operating alongside the overt hierarchical structure of the department is another more covert system of ranking based on the concept of 'hard work'. Members are valued depending on the effort and hours they put into the job regardless of their status. Conversely, any one who is considered lazy – not pulling their weight – is ranked lowly. Both learning support teachers and assistants contribute to this informal system by discussing amongst themselves who has done what in the department. Praise and scorn are heaped upon absent colleagues, as are reflected in the following.

Journal extract: learning support department

Philip asks me about being an LSA. Two points emerge: he thinks that some LSAs work harder than others and also some LSAs work harder than some of the teachers in the department.

(ref: 17/6/en)

This refers to Kelly Whitbread, one of the learning support teachers. Philip Cleary and Sharon Houghton often complained obliquely to each other about her. A number of the LSAs were more open in their criticisms, especially about her off-loading her work onto others. Indeed, I experienced this myself on a number of occasions. For the LSAs their anger seems to be fuelled further because she is a teacher. Their pride in working hard, despite poor pay, is undermined because she is perceived as doing less whilst earning more.

Another strand in the nature of the relationships formed within the department is that of close friendships amongst members, blurring the divide between the personal and the professional. These are a powerful strength of the department.

*"It's lovely to work here. From the day I started I was welcomed.
Everybody helped me and I still feel now that if I had a problem I'd ask."*

(Carol Marina, LSA)

These friendships are partly shaped by external factors, such as age and mutual interests but they have also developed through sharing experiences at work. In this way whatever happens, whether inside or outside the school, the department provides a powerful haven, and a sense of belonging, for its members.

Although tempers are sometimes frayed amongst members of the department, humour is deployed to relieve tensions, with Philip Cleary occasionally taking the brunt of sexist jokes. Indeed, he seems to balance rather uneasily on the edge of the department's support structures. Possibly his position as its head makes it less comfortable for him to participate in discussions about personal and/or professional difficulties as openly as others do. However, his separateness is also related to his gender: the only man in a department of fourteen women. In both ways he is less able to identify with, and gain support from, his departmental colleagues. In our interview he stresses his isolation.

Three times he describes his role in the department, and more generally in the school, as *"lonely"*.

"It's a lonely role in the sense that everybody, the whole staff, in fact, not just my team, comes to me."

Later when I ask him, *"So whom do you turn to for support?"* he replies:

"I was thinking about that the other day, funnily enough and it's a lonely role because there isn't somebody."

And then, there is that echo again as he highlights his position as the only man in the department:

"It's a lonely role, because when there was a bloke in the department we used to go out and play golf occasionally and we used to come down to reality."

Not only does Philip Cleary separate himself from the women in the department by defining *"reality"* as being on a golf course with a man, but some of the women in the department also keep him apart through the use of sexual banter. The theme of this is the inadequacies of men, and in particular their sexual prowess, or lack of it. Philip Cleary is expected to negotiate this in good spirits, without loss of face and maintaining his dignity as head of department. The following incidents are typical.

Journal extract: departmental meeting

Philip Cleary explains, "The educational psychologist came up with some ideas which I thought were good". Shirley Dunton comments, "I suppose that means she was wearing a short skirt when you saw her." Philip ignores this remark.

(ref: 1/7/dmt)

Journal extract: learning support department office

Maria Channing arrives with a long list of jokes and reads them out loud. All are at the expense of men. Sophie Atkins copies one onto the board behind Philip Cleary's desk.

'What do you call a man with lots of money and a big willy?'

'Darling!'

She draws a large arrow from the last word to Philip's chair. The joke is later removed. At no point does Philip make reference to it. (ref: 22/6/bg)

When I asked Philip Cleary about these sorts of incidents, he said, *"To be honest, I don't look at [the department] as being females"*. I found this surprising. How does he perceive them, then? And why does he wish he could *"play golf... with a bloke in the department"*? Why not with one of the fourteen members who happen to be female? When I pressed him further he said:

"I welcome the banter that goes on. If I was ignored and nobody made any jokes about me I would think I wasn't making any impact... I'm just saying that this is part of being the boss, not male."

Despite Philip Cleary's protestations, these jokes are clearly gender specific and sexual in content. He also suggests that the teasing of the *"boss"* is *"very good-natured"* in so far as it is not undertaken with the deliberate intention to offend him. Arguably, it is a way for the department to encourage him to participate. However, there is undoubtedly an element of humiliation involved: it is a form of bullying. His responses are subdued and awkward. He seems to find it difficult to retaliate. Even if he wanted to he probably could not. In the workplace, comments by men about women's sexual inadequacies are a social taboo, and this divide is reinforced because of his position of authority within the department. He is forced into being a 'good sport'. In these female dominated relationships he lacks power and the women are able to exploit his weakness.

Inter-departmental relationships: teacher and LSAs

Because of its provision of in-class support for students, members of the learning support department necessarily work alongside colleagues from other

departments. The success of this work relies greatly on the quality of the relationships formed between class teachers and the LSA, or less frequently the LST, assigned to them. During the course of a week each LSA works with a range of teachers throughout the school. For example, in my first two days at Bowden School I supported eight members of staff. However, the difference in status between non-teaching and teaching staff can act as a barrier to the formation of participatory relationships.

Within the cultures of Bowden School individual teachers are autonomous in their classrooms. Each has his/her own set of expectations about how their lessons should be managed. Therefore the onus is on LSAs to accommodate the demands of different teachers into their working practices. Doing so requires skills of negotiation and flexibility. (These are, of course, similar to the daily demands made of students.) Joanna York describes some of the tactics she uses to manage her role in the lessons of a humanities teacher. In doing so she reveals the imbalance of power in their relationship based on perceptions about differences in status between a teacher and an LSA.

"When you go in, Susanna will say, 'That's your chair for learning support.' she'll want you to sit on it and not move. If the children ask you a question she tries to get over before you can. I think she feels a bit threatened... Because of all this I said, 'Look, Susanna, whatever it is you want me to do, you tell me.' I think that helped a bit sort of saying, 'You're the boss.' ...What do you call it? An ego-massage...[laughs] Anyway, I found it helped."

Poor communication leads to misunderstandings and confusions, impelling teachers to exploit the power differential in the relationships between themselves and LSAs. In turn, LSAs are forced to manage their role by demeaning themselves. Their strong sense of worth, fostered amongst

themselves within the culture of the learning support department, is then dissipated by their experiences in the wider school.

Carol Marina describes her emotional response to working with some teachers.

"In some lessons... I felt inferior and I let those teachers continue to make me feel inferior... There were quite a few lessons last year I really felt uneasy about... Others I've been in and I don't even know if the teacher has known I've been there. They don't speak to you to say 'hello' or 'goodbye' or anything. I try to catch the teacher's eye on entering a room just to give a nod and the same on leaving. But I've realised now they don't look at me sometimes, so I just leave."

Feeling *"inferior"* and *"uneasy"*, as well as being ignored, are barriers to the development of participatory working relationship between LSAs and classroom teachers. This in turn impacts upon the quality of support offered to students.

In contrast to the stories above, some teachers set out to develop more equitable and welcoming relationships with their LSAs. Carol Marina provides the following example of a teacher with whom she has developed a good working relationship.

"One geography teacher... I feel she'd be lost without some support in that class... She's an excellent teacher. She always tells me at the beginning of the lesson what's she's going to do and gives me any differentiated work that she's done... She leaves it to me to decide whether or not to use it or to let them have the same as the other children. Sometimes I think, 'Oh gosh, she's left it to me to decide.'"

Here the relationship between Carol Marina and the teacher is based on mutual respect for each other's work. Both have a valuable and valued role to play in the lessons. Carol Marina's knowledge and experience of the students is recognised. She is expected to be responsible for making professional decisions about students' needs. She does not feel *"inferior"* or *"uneasy"*, nor is she ignored.

However, in many classrooms the status of LSAs and teachers is still perceived as inequitable. In the following interview extract Joanna York offers her story of good practice, yet even here the teacher maintains his authority over her.

"Barry [Shotter] said from the word go, 'Any problem, you deal with it the way you want and I'll support you one hundred percent even if we discuss it afterwards'... I don't feel I'm stepping on his toes or doing anything I shouldn't."

He does not suggest, and neither does she seem to expect, that she might also question his handling of a "problem". Yet, there will be students in these lessons whom she knows much better than him and she may therefore be more knowledgeable about responding to their behaviour. However, classroom management is not a matter to be negotiated and that he might also 'step on her toes' is scarcely imaginable.

When I asked Laura Clark, a music teacher, about her relationships with LSAs she focused on the difficulty of having another adult in the room whose approach to the lesson is different from hers.

"As you know, we work in silence and if you've got somebody who's got a rather loud voice... it can be quite frustrating. The kids hear that and think... 'It's all right to have a bit of a chin wag'. But it's not. It's very difficult for a teacher to say, 'Look can you keep your voice down?' I often direct it to the kid they are working with and say, 'Can you not speak so loudly?' That is irritating: it's just not helpful. But having said that, in lessons I have support, I have noticed a difference in the kids' progress."

The following is an earlier extract from my journal:

Journal extract: music lesson year eight

I joke with a student about the muddle we are getting in over a particular piece she is trying to play. Laura Clark calls out, "I think there's a lot of

chatting going on between those two, (meaning me). She says it with a smile but I still feel like I'm being reprimanded for being naughty.*

(ref: 12/10/6)

In these stories both of us seem awkward and offended but unable to talk about it. I left that music lesson feeling rather angry. Apart from anything else I was reminded about how unpleasant it is to be publicly reprimanded whether as a student or an adult. It helped to clarify for me the difference in status between an LSA and a teacher, however covert it might seem. As an LSA I would never have spoken in that manner to a teacher. However, it did not occur to me at the time that such experiences were also difficult for the classroom teacher. Laura Clark has clear ideas about how to teach music practicals - in near silence - but as an LSA I thought my role was to support students partly through encouraging discussion about their work. These issues were never raised between us until I stopped being an LSA and interviewed her as part of my research work.

Classroom teachers may be threatened by the presence of another adult observing them at work. They may fear that an LSA will interfere with their practice, criticise their dealings with students or undermine their authority. These are barriers to the development of participatory relationships too. However, for in-class support to be successful LSAs need to feel wanted and valued. Teachers have the authority and power to encourage the participation of support staff but they also have the authority and power to exclude them. LSAs recognise that their status in the institutional structures of the school is different from that of teachers but they consider the role they fulfil is valuable.

Carol Marina also argues that when forming relationships with LSAs, classroom teachers should acknowledge the respect accorded to any human being:

"I don't think it's not wanting us, because if I'm missing they come to Philip [Cleary] and say they need support. It's possibly that they think we ought to know our place, a few, not many. Not enough to make me want to leave the job... I don't mind being inferior. I know I'm not as qualified as a teacher and I don't expect to be on the same level as a teacher. But as a person I'm the same as a teacher. I'm a human being."

Relationships amongst Students

In this section I consider how far school policies and practices are able to promote participatory relationships between students. I begin by discussing the centrality of friendships in the lives of students. I consider how notions of identity and belonging shape the formation of friendships, both inside and outside classrooms, by exploring the influence of age, academic attainment, gender and ethnicity on the choices that are made. I argue that students generally choose to belong to friendship groups comprising those who are recognisably like themselves and that whilst such relationships provide security they also help to sustain divisions and prejudices between groups of students. I then examine the antithesis of friendships by considering how bullying amongst students is embedded in the institutional structures of the school. I explore student and staff attitudes to bullying and scrutinise inconsistencies in the school's anti-bullying policy and practices.

The centrality of friendships

"And what does Isabel think about Bowden School?"

"She loves it. Yes, she loves it."

"What is it that she loves?"

"She loves her friends."

(Carol Marina, LSA and parent)

This interview extract highlights the centrality of friendships in the lives of students at Bowden School. For Isabel, like many other students, her relationships with her friends seem crucial to her day to day happiness. Or, as one year eight student explained to me: *"Being with my friends, is the reason why I like coming to school"*. Students' friendships extend beyond lessons into the rest of the school day and beyond. Relationships start, develop and are abandoned in classrooms, playgrounds, canteens and on the journeys to and from school. These are powerful times and places for social encounters. For students who are members of a strong group of friends, lunch breaks for example are opportunities to relax, converse, laugh and play. Within the cultures of the school, friendships signal success and provide a sense of belonging. For those students who do not have the support of a group of friends such times can be boring, lonely, stressful and even frightening. Not belonging to a peer group can signify failure.

Because friendships are pivotal to students' happiness and sense of self worth, when they go wrong the consequences can be devastating. During one of the year eight group interviews Sammy Turner told the story of how her friendship with Mel Buchan temporarily broke down and the devastating effect this had on her attitude to school. Mel was also a member of the group being interviewed.

"About a year ago me and Mel fell out. She kept on calling me names, didn't you? I was all worried because I was in year seven, it was only the second month I'd been here and I was scared to come back to school. I've known Mel ever since primary school, we were friends, and I didn't know she could be that nasty. I was scared. I didn't want to come to school at all... I talked to mum and she made me... I told a teacher once but they didn't do anything."

The following are my accompanying interview notes.

Journal extract: group interview with students from year eight

Sammy sounds very hesitant and looks at Mel and me for reassurance throughout, although Mel does not speak. The rest of the group keep very quiet and listen intently. This is probably one of the moments of greatest concentration I have observed during my time at the school. At the end of the interview Mel tells me privately that she also had friendship problems in year seven.

(ref: 11/5/4)

Sammy's tale is dismissed at the time by both of the adults in whom she confides, yet when she tells the students their intense interest and concern is an indication of the horror it evokes, over a year after it happened. Falling out with friends, being called names and feeling scared are all powerful experiences with which others in the group, including Mel, seem able to identify.

Choosing friends

The relationships that students form at Bowden School reflect and contribute to its cultures. Both inside and outside classrooms students tend to make friends with those whom they perceive to be more like them than not. Factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and notions of academic attainment influence choices and highlight ways in which students identify themselves and their peers. Some of these processes support the development of more participatory relationships whilst others act as barriers to them. It is not easy to untangle how far prejudice and misunderstanding prevent more diverse friendships from being formed.

The institutional structures of the school help to determine friendship patterns inside classrooms; for example, arranging students in same-age teaching groups encourages same-age friendships. Outside lessons, students' choices are

potentially wider. Theoretically they can select from some thirteen hundred students, although relationships in lessons often spill over into other times and places in the school. Also, the greater choice afforded outside lessons paradoxically narrows the selection. For example, in lessons boys of different ethnic backgrounds often work together, but out of classes white and Pakistani boys, in particular, are less likely to sustain their relationships. Choosing friends from amongst those with whom students consider themselves to feel most comfortable is undoubtedly important.

The strongest divide in every classroom is that of age. The timetable at Bowden, as for most other secondary schools in England, arranges for its students to be taught in same-age classes. This structure is so readily accepted by all members of the school that it is not even questioned. Therefore, in terms of classroom friendships, students have no choice but to form relationships with peers of similar age. Once outside the restraints of lessons, students are able to mix with others from different year groups, including neighbours and siblings and their friends. The structuring of tutor groups into mixed ages has also helped to develop positive relationships between older and younger students. The importance of these arrangements is emphasised in the following exchange between three sixth form students as they recollect being in year seven:

"Some of the older students were really nice... they gave you support if you had any problems."

"Especially when you first come here. They give you older pupils to take you to lessons, look after you."

"It helped your confidence, because when you're... small and young you notice the older pupils more. But in registration it's easier to get to know a few."

At the same time, as is suggested by the final comment above, older students are perceived by younger students as potential bullies, particularly boys. There

is no doubt that groups of young men who are sixteen years old can seem intimidating to eleven-year-olds. Indeed, this section on student relationships ends with the story of boy in year seven being bullied by older students.

Also built into the timetabling structures of the school is the arrangement for students, in some subjects at least, to be taught in classes based on notions of academic attainment. These arrangements shape student friendships as well. However, even in classes that are not set in this way students generally choose to sit and work with peers who are of similar academic attainment. Although it is unlikely that students deliberately weigh up the relative achievements of their peers before deciding with whom to be friends, the following interview extract provides some explanation for why such choices are made. A group of sixth formers look back on their experiences of being in what they refer to as 'mixed' and 'higher ability' sets.

"In the first year I got a lot of stick because I was clever... 'square', 'boffin', things like that."

"You always get noticed if you're clever... if you answer questions, make a comment or anything. When you get split up into your ability groups that just doesn't happen anymore."

"To begin with we were all mixed in the lessons but later on... when they split you up into abilities... everyone had got the same attitude to the work... you all wanted to get on... In the lower [groups] they've got the attitude that 'we don't want to work' so even less work is done... perhaps there are students who do want to work but just aren't capable and they get lost."

These students are more comfortable in classes that are set because they perceive students in the 'higher' groups to be like themselves: more hard working and less threatening. In mixed attainment classes, which do not afford this protection, it is still safer to sit with students whom they consider to be of

comparable ability. Similarly, for students who are less confident about their academic achievements it is more comfortable to work alongside peers who do not threaten with their apparent cleverness. These are the students who perhaps might dismiss them, as these sixth formers do, for having the attitude that they *"don't want to work"* or for being just *"not capable"*.

Gender is also a powerful factor in shaping relationships. In classrooms, it is possibly more influential than age since it is a feature of friendships over which students have some choice. Girls prefer to sit next to and work with girls, and boys opt to be with other boys. I did not observe a single lesson where this was not the case. This is not to say that boys and girls do not communicate with one another: jokes and insults fly through the air in some lessons. However, if social and emotional comfort comes from sitting with a friend, discomfort arises when a girl and boy are made to sit together by a member of staff. Out of lessons, friendships at Bowden School are still defined by gender although not so clearly. Occasionally girls and boys form pairs, arms around each other, holding hands or occasionally kissing, as sexual and quasi-sexual relationships develop. However, more generally, girls are close friends with other girls and boys with boys, although mixed gender friendship groups are more likely as students become older, particularly in the sixth form.

Such a clear divide does not exist in terms of students forming friendships amongst their peers from different ethnic groups. A straightforward explanation for this, with regards to classroom relationships, is that the proportions are not the same as for gender. For example, I worked with some teaching groups in which there would be only one or two students who were not white. The most noticeable pattern I observed was that often, but not always, Muslim girls would sit together in pairs and where there was only a single Muslim girl she usually

sat on her own. Muslim boys were generally more integrated within their teaching groups. The reasons for this are complex.

Students at Bowden School, whatever their ethnic group, have strong friendships based on local communities, including the primary school they attended. It may well be that friendships started there have continued into secondary school. Or it may be that non-Muslim girls discourage their Muslim peers from being friends with them and therefore leave them no choice but to sit together or alone. That Muslim boys are more likely than girls to form classroom friendships across a range of religious and ethnic backgrounds may be because they have greater opportunities to socialise outside school than girls who are expected to be more home and community based. Although I did not observe a single instance of overt racism between students during lessons it is not easy to identify covert racism taking place in student relationships. In Chapter Six I have already discussed how ignorance and prejudice amongst students from different ethnic backgrounds, act as barriers to their relationships.

Once out of the classroom, friendships for both boys and girls at Bowden School are more likely to be shaped by students' ethnic backgrounds. Even if, for example, a Pakistani and a white student choose to sit and work alongside one another in lessons their relationship might not extend to the playground where their choice of friends is much greater. I asked Eleanor Wharton, head of language support, about these observations.

"You find that some students from the Pakistani community keep together. They come from primary schools where they are ninety per cent of the school's intake. They don't mix as well as Pakistani students who live in other areas of Markston and have gone to primary schools where they are in a minority... The [Muslim] girls... are not used to mixing with white students, especially boys. They feel threatened outside the Muslim

community... Some of the boys hang about in gangs and... they seem to learn from somewhere... that these gangs are opposed rather than getting along together."

These comments highlight the complexity of how friendship groups are, and are not, formed. Although Eleanor Wharton focuses on ethnicity this can not be untangled from other aspects of identity such as gender, religion and local community as well as experiences at previous schools. In all these ways, the desire to belong to friendship groups that provide security through being comfortably recognisable also help to sustain divisions and prejudices which in turn perpetuate the urge for friendships based on safety.

The question of bullying

Bullying amongst students is embedded in the institutional cultures of Bowden School. All the year eight students who participated in the group interviews argued that bullying was something that happened regularly in the school. When I asked if any of them had been the victims of bullying during their fifteen months at the school over half said they had. One student described her anxieties in this way:

"You don't want to come to school... And you feel worried that they are going to get you out of school and that your parents might not do anything. When my friend got bullied she went to her mum and her mum didn't do nothing and she was just crouched up in a corner of her house. Some people who are being bullied tell the teachers but they don't deal with it. "

Here the relationship between the student and a bully is portrayed as a barrier to participation. However, relationships between her and her parent and her teachers also form barriers to participation since neither of these adults take seriously her concerns about being bullied.

Like the students to whom I spoke, staff at Bowden School also acknowledge that bullying is part of the school's institutional cultures. In recognition of this there is a clear anti-bullying policy in place that sets out to manage such incidents. Extracts from this are shown in Figure 7:2.

Figure 7:2 Bowden School's anti-bullying policy

- *Bullying is unacceptable behaviour at Bowden.*
- *Bullying can only damage the people involved and also has a knock on effect on those who have witnessed the various incidents.*
- *Any allegations must be investigated and acted upon.*
- *Always respond to reports of bullying. Doing nothing or telling a victim to come back if it happens again is supporting the bully!*
- *Consistency of approach from all staff will help to produce a school environment where everyone can feel comfortable and safe.*
- *There are many reasons why people bully, including lacking self-esteem, failure to achieve and having been a victim of bullying oneself. Both the bully and the victim need help.*

(Extracts from Staff Handbook)

These policy extracts suggest that staff at Bowden School are expected to take instances of student bullying very seriously indeed and in some ways they do. For example, during my interviews with staff none disagreed with any aspect of this policy and all argued unequivocally that bullying is abhorrent. However, in practice their responses to incidents of bullying are less clearly defined. Bullying might be unacceptable but it is also considered to be inevitable. These ambiguities are illustrated in the way in which incidents of bullying are reported in the school.

Journal extracts: staff meetings

Some Bowden School students have been bullying local primary school children, including throwing stones at them. There is little response from staff to this information. Form tutors are asked to have a "quiet word" with their tutor groups so that the culprits are "aware that they have been seen."

(ref: 13/7/bmt)

Organising a taxi to take Sean to and from school has been a "great success... It has helped to alleviate the bullying."

(ref: 15/7/dmt)

Catherine says some students attend homework club because they are scared of being bullied at lunch times. They feel "safer" in the [learning support] department. She suggests we should also offer a "board club" to let these students "play games and relax and not just do school work."

(ref: 1/7/dmt)

A boy on report for bullying is called "a pain in the butt... a nutter". Later a girl who has also been caught bullying is described as "only evil sometimes."

(ref: 17/9/hmt)

These extracts demonstrate that there is a high level of openness amongst staff about student bullying which then helps them to respond with a range of practical measures intended to alleviate known problems. For example, a "quiet word" is directed at the stone throwing culprits and a "board club" is proposed to provide a sanctuary from bullying for students working with the learning support department. However, these approaches bypass the fundamental problem that, within the school's cultures, there are student relationships based on fear and intimidation. The stone throwers are to be warned but there is no suggestion that they must be identified and then helped to understand how frightening their behaviour may have been for the primary aged students. Attending the board club does not alleviate the fear of these students at other times during the school, or go to the source of their anxieties: those who are bullying them. Sean's taxi similarly avoids dealing with underlying causes.

Such actions offer neither long-term support for victims of bullying nor help for those who are bullies, even though both are specifically referred to in the school's policy documents. Indeed the derogatory terms in which staff refer to students who are considered to be bullies suggest that they are beyond help: "nutter" and "evil". Some of these remarks might have been made humorously but they still imply that such students are outside notions of 'normality'. All of these practices reinforce the belief that whilst bullying is unwelcome it is inevitable. As Joanna York remarked, from the perspective of both an LSA and a parent: *"There are some children who are bullied and it just goes on and on"*. Despite the rhetoric of policy, bullying not only continues but is expected to continue. There is no policy document about how staff should help students to form positive and supportive friendships: this crucial aspect of their lives is left for them to sort out. In the one hundred and eighteen pages of the *Staff Handbook* there is only a single oblique reference to student *"relationships"*.

The following story illustrates further some of these issues. It is about Ray, a student in year seven. On the evening in which it took place I had just finished working with him in a science lesson.

Journal extract: at the end of a school day

As I cross over from one building to another I come across Ray, surrounded by a number of large boys, possibly in years ten or eleven. They run off as I approach. Ray is crying and looks frightened. He tells me, between sobs, that they held him upside down and swung him between them. He does not know (or does not want to say) who the boys are. I ask some other students, who are close by, if they can identify them. None is prepared to say. Two students explain they would be "beaten up" if they did. I do not know the names of any of these students either and they drift away. This is very frustrating: I feel angry and distressed. All I can do is to walk with Ray to the bike racks and check that he feels safe to cycle home.

When I get back to the office, two members of the department ask what is wrong. It is clear that I am upset. They are sympathetic until I mention Ray and then their reactions change. They argue that he probably “deserved it” as he is always “winding up other people”. I wait to talk to Philip Cleary. He seems to view the incident more seriously. At least he is aware of how angry I am.

When I return to school on the following Monday, Philip explains the action he has taken. He has spoken to Shirley Dunton, who is responsible for year seven students in the department. She has talked to Ray. However, when I later see Shirley she too says that Ray can be “provoking” and that he might have hit some one else first. I point out that the boys concerned were huge compared to him and that he seemed very scared.

(ref: 3/6/en + 8/6/bk)

In this story Ray is not only abused by the boys who physically hurt him, he is also let down by other students too frightened to support him. However, injustice comes not only from the students but also from the staff who are so casual about the incident. The reaction I received from my colleagues makes one wonder what support students like Ray would be given if they had reported the bullying themselves. Not only is the idea of Ray’s distress minimised but they also imply that he deserves to be frightened because he is a bully too. If this is so – although the two members of staff gave no evidence – why has he not been helped? The school’s policy draws attention to the relationship between being a victim and a perpetrator of bullying but such links are not considered by my colleagues. They distance themselves from his pain by making him less than human. In my notes I have also added that this is the time I felt most like an outsider whilst at Bowden School. I was furious. I also wonder if the fact that Ray is black and male played any part in their perception of the story.

Relationships between Staff and Students

In the final section of this chapter I explore how relationships between staff and students are shaped by the institutional structures of the school. I begin by considering Bowden School's formal policies on rules for, and behaviour of, students. I examine the beliefs that shape these systems and argue that they illustrate the types of student behaviours which staff value as well as the types of student behaviours which they fear. I also consider students' attitudes to the regulations imposed upon them. I then examine the role of the pastoral system in developing relationships between students and staff. I consider how rules, behaviour and discipline impact upon their experiences and the ambiguity of the role of pastoral staff as both 'friend' and 'law enforcer'. I end this section by reflecting on the purposes of the house and school councils. I evaluate this structure as a means of empowering students and thereby strengthening relationships between staff and students. I argue that in practice this does not happen because the concerns and opinions of students are valued less highly than those of staff.

Rules and behaviour

Bowden School's formal policies on the rules for, and behaviour of, students are part of its institutional structures. Putting these policies into practice impacts upon the nature of the relationships between staff and students. As the *Staff Handbook* states:

"It is as important for us to 'manage' behaviour as it is for us to 'manage' the learning process. In fact, the two are inextricably linked."

Implicit in this statement is the belief that the behaviour of students (*them*) needs to be *managed* and that it is the responsibility of members of staff (*us*) to do so. The greatest fear is of students who may become 'out of control'.

Throughout the *Staff Handbook* the need for “a more controlled and calm school”, “a calm and orderly environment” and “an ordered environment” is reiterated.

Such policies reflect beliefs held deep within the cultures of the school about students’ behaviour. They embody the types of ‘good’ behaviours that are valued by staff and for which students are rewarded as well the types of ‘bad’ behaviours that are not valued and for which students should be punished. This is illustrated in the school’s *Code of Behaviour*, as shown in Figure 7:3.

Figure 7:3 Bowden School’s Code of Behaviour

- *Respect other people and what they have to say.*
- *Make sure you always do your best: the quality of your work says a lot about you.*
- *Follow the instructions of staff and keep to the school rules: to give you the greatest chance of success, school must be well ordered and calm.*
- *Think about your safety and the safety of others by looking after your school, the building and the people in it.*
- *Attend school regularly and be punctual at all times to give yourself the greatest chance of being successful.*
- *Make sure you are well organised and properly equipped and that you wear the correct school uniform.*

(Extract from *Staff Handbook*)

This emphasises, for example, the value staff place on the notion of “respect [for] other people”. However, its inclusion in the *Code of Behaviour* highlights the assumption of staff that some students will misbehave by acting in a disrespectful manner. By addressing all the statements in Figure 7:3 in this way it is possible to ascertain the fears of staff about the worst sorts of

behaviour they might expect from students. That is, *not* doing their best, *not* following the instructions of staff, *not* being safe, *not* attending school regularly or being punctual, and so on. Embedded within all these rules, however overtly technical some appear to be, are moral imperatives. In this context wearing the “*correct school uniform*” is as value laden as showing “*respect*”. Both are presented as being necessary to have the “*best chance of being successful*” in the school, which in itself is presented as an unquestioned moral absolute.

Another fundamental assumption is that teachers have a right, even a duty to punish, correct and modify students’ behaviour: hence the euphemistically named policy document “*Reinforcing Expectations*”. None of the staff I talked to questioned these assumptions. Some disagreed with individual rules, for example strictures about school uniform, but none argued with the underlying notion that part of a teacher’s job was to impose a set of rules on students. The extent to which the majority of students conform to the expectations laid out in these policies illustrates how far they too accept these beliefs.

Bowden School’s systems of rules, and accompanying strategies for rewards and sanctions, regulate many aspects of a student’s everyday school life. There are twenty-three pages in the *Staff Handbook* covering behaviour policies, plus additional sections on rules about “*Homework*”, “*School Uniform Requirements*” and “*Break and Lunchtimes*”. For students, these impact upon the clothes they wear, how they should walk along corridors, their access to school buildings, the times they eat and even when they may use the lavatory. At the same time, this emphasis on modifying the behaviour of students also causes the conduct of staff to be regulated. The sections in the *Staff Handbook*, referred to above, are as much rules for staff as they are for students since the former are expected to enforce compliance in the latter.

For students, the school's formal system of rules reflects a parallel set of values and beliefs, by which they consider their freedom to be frequently curtailed and their wishes not often respected. This is not to say that they regularly discuss these issues amongst themselves. The rules are generally accepted without question. They are part of the rituals of belonging and they believe themselves powerless to change them. However, in the group interviews with year eight students the school's rules dominated our discussions. For example, they were unanimous in their opposition to wearing school uniform. One girl said:

"You know we said about feeling yourself. Well, how can you be yourself when you are wearing a school uniform?"

Most of the boys did not want to wear a tie and resented the fact that girls did not do so. Another source of irritation was that they were only allowed to wear black or blue coats and trainers were forbidden: *"What difference does it make to who we are?"*

Students argued that some rules were unfair because they were really punishments. For example, they disliked not being allowed in the school buildings during breaks and lunchtimes. They talked about being "cold", "wet" and "tired". They argued that because some students are not trusted by staff, all are penalised.

"Why can't we go inside? What do they think we're going to do. We only want to be with our friends."

They applied the same criticism to the rule against chewing gum.

"Well, chewing gum, what's the problem? What's it harming the teachers? Chewing can help kids concentrate... I know people stick it under the desk but if teachers let the children chew, they wouldn't have to do that. They could put it in the bins."

A number of the students were unhappy about being told off for talking in class as illustrated by the following discussion:

"It's not fair... You want to talk... and you can't because every time you talk the teachers say, shush or shut up or try to concentrate."

"I think you can talk about other things and still get on with your work."

"When you get a detention for talking the teacher doesn't know what you are talking about. What if it's something about the work? They don't actually know."

It would be easy to trivialise these remarks about clothes, chewing gum, getting wet at lunchtimes and talking to friends. However, students consider these restraints are indications that staff do not respect or trust them as a group. Such rules are a measure of how students are relatively devalued within the school's cultures and this impacts negatively on their relationships with staff. Students believe they know what to wear, how to behave indoors, and how best to get on with their work. It would be unthinkable for staff not to have, for example, somewhere to keep warm and dry at lunch times or lavatories which were open throughout the day. Staff would also expect to be able to choose what clothes they wear and to talk in class whenever they considered it appropriate to do so.

The pastoral system

The pastoral organisation at Bowden School is one of its central institutional structures. Members of staff see it as playing a crucial part in promoting positive relationships between students and themselves. The role of the form tutor is described in the *Staff Handbook* as *"one of the most important in the school"*. Each tutor group comprises students from years seven to eleven, who remain with the same tutor throughout their time at the school, or until they enter the sixth form, which has its own separate house. Therefore only about

five new students from year seven join the group each September. Tutor groups are assigned to one of six houses and these are overseen by the house head who also remains with the same students during their first five years.

One of the primary purposes of this arrangement is to provide tutors with the opportunity to get to know their students as individuals over time. However, tensions exist in these relationships because of inherent ambiguities. Form tutors are expected to take on the role of supportive friend as well as law enforcer. Arguably this mirrors the relationship between a parent and a child – in *locus parentis* – but this is a false analogy. The balance between care, love, affection and control, power and authority are not comparable. Teachers have far less opportunity to respond to the needs of individual students than a parent. Bowden School is an institution and, within certain parameters, conformity of behaviour from both students *and* form tutors is expected.

For example, the *Staff Handbook* provides a list of responsibilities for form tutors relating to a number of school rules, as noted in Figure 7:4.

Figure 7:4 Role of the form tutor at Bowden School

The tutor's responsibilities are:

- *To mark the register... making sure that absences are checked.*
- *To ensure punctuality amongst students.*
- *To ensure that uniform is regularly checked.*
- *To check and sign the student record book regularly.*

Yet on the same page in the *Staff Handbook*, the role of the form tutor is described as ideally being:

"A mixture of guide, counsellor, friend, supporter and source of knowledge about the child... Tutors must aim to develop a good relationship with each of the individuals in their group."

Tutors argue that activities like checking uniform are fundamentally inconsistent with the aim of developing worthwhile relationships with students. As one tutor, speaking at a house meeting, explains:

"I do not want to start every day with some students, by telling them off... nagging... complaining... this undermines... my role as friend".

These contradictory aspects of their relationships with students are not easy for staff to resolve. The following extract from my journal highlights similar frustrations as tutors' efforts to form supportive relationships with tutees are undermined by other pressures in the school.

Journal extract: house meeting

A heated discussion takes place about the practicality of enforcing uniform and equipment rules and, then more interestingly, why form tutors should perform this role. Tutors have been set "targets" to measure the success of rule enforcement: for example, "By 1st June maximum of one student per tutor group not carrying Record Book". Tutors seem amused and angry in equal parts.

"Well, if I'm a successful teacher by achieving that, I'm stuffed."
And then more seriously:

"But what are we doing as a school to support these youngsters?"

(ref: 3/6/hmt)

This dilemma exists throughout all levels of the pastoral system at Bowden School, including the house system. The purpose of this is described in the *Staff Handbook* as being:

"To break down the school into smaller units where children can be clearly identified, cared for, encouraged and, where necessary, supported to improve their levels of achievement and behaviour."

The phrase, *"supported to improve their... behaviour"*, once again highlights the tensions and incongruity in the relationships between students and staff. Much of the work of house heads, like form tutors, is spent dealing with discipline and behaviour issues. I asked Laura Clark about her role as house head. She initially described it in terms of *"negatives"*.

"You get a lot of negatives in the job... More often than not, you're dealing with issues of behaviour which haven't been sorted out in departments. Or issues of trancies... the majority of the jobs tend to be negatives."

However, when I asked her to tell me about a rewarding aspect of her work she focused on a story in which the quality of her relationship with a student was crucial in helping that student overcome problems at school.

"I got a call from some parents saying they wanted to see me... They said that their daughter didn't want to come to school... basically they didn't know what to do with her... I [made] a home visit and got the impression that she didn't want to talk to me while her dad was there. I suggested that when she came into school we could have a more detailed chat. Just us. I think the fact that I'm younger helps with somebody like that... So I got her back... it sounds like I did it in twenty-four hours... but it was a process of weeks getting her into school and chatting. She'd had problems with friendships, bitching, falling out... She said she didn't want to go back into certain lessons, she couldn't face them... So she went into some lessons and she worked at home for the rest... Gradually we've eased her back in and now she's full time attending all her lessons. I'm getting very good reports about her generally... a success story so to speak... I still see her just to make sure everything's OK."

Developing this supportive relationship with a student has taken time and commitment from Laura Clark. In telling the story her affection and concern for the student is clear. However, it is also interesting to note that the *"success story"* she chose to tell me was not about a student who had 'misbehaved'. It is still perhaps easier for staff to form positive relationships with students who difficulties are based on their being 'victims' rather than 'recalcitrants'.

House and school councils

The student house and school councils are part of the institutional structures of Bowden School, as described in the *Staff Handbook*:

"Each house has its own 'Student Council' which enables its pupils to voice their opinions and organise extra curricular and tutorial activities. The House Council also elects two representatives to sit on the School Council."

Formally they are an important part of relationships between staff and students because their purpose is to break down barriers of status and power and to ensure that students' concerns are taken seriously. In practice they provide students with something of a hollow voice.

The councils undoubtedly offer some opportunities for students to "voice their opinions", however this is not the same as giving them the power to participate in the decision-making structures of the school. Students are encouraged to introduce topics about the school which interest or concern them: bullying and the state of the lavatories feature regularly. But neither staff nor students suggest that they make a contribution to broader policy decisions. No students mentioned house or school councils to me informally during my time at the school, or when I interviewed them, unless I introduced the topic first. The councils are clearly not a prominent feature of their lives.

Unsurprisingly, students with the greatest sense of involvement are those who are council representatives. However, even they do not expect to bring about real changes.

"We're always talking about the toilets, the girls' toilets really, but nothing happens... about getting them clean, looking nice... They're still the same."

Students who are not representatives are even more dismissive, describing the councils as "a waste of time", arguing that they "don't make any difference" and

"teachers just do what they want to do". Even if they see the councils as a means by which their voices might be heard they do not expect them to be heeded. The assumption is that staff will only agree to changes that they want anyway.

The perspectives of the staff involved are more ambivalent: providing a forum in which students can express their views is accepted, but like the students, staff do not see it as a powerful force for change. The idea of forming relationships in which power is shared more equitably is undermined by the belief, deeply held within the cultures of Bowden School, that members of staff are better able to make decisions than students. This ambivalence is illustrated by the comments of Laura Clark, head of house. I asked her which topics students raise most frequently:

"It's issues like, unbelievably, 'Why isn't the library open more often?'... The toilets are another one that's always comes up. 'Why are the toilets blocked?' Well, it's because of the vandalism... Bullying comes up quite often. They feel ... that there should be a set of rules... that teachers should follow when bullying is reported to them."

Although these are arguably reasonable concerns, she then makes the following comments:

"Obviously they've got to temper it with realism. I said that to them... if they want to blow the school up, then it's not going to happen. If they say there's not going to be any uniform, it's not going to happen... But there are issues where they can make a difference... They're running a years seven and eight disco. Had it been left to staff that probably wouldn't have happened... We've got our first trip coming up in January, to see a pantomime... So they are making differences, not huge ones, but enough to give them a sense of, 'We've got some say'. And I think that's important."

The authority of the student councils is undermined in two important ways. First, even when students raise policy issues the process of decision-making remains firmly in the hands of teachers. Second, the emphasis on social events, notwithstanding the intrinsic value of such occasions, bypasses the issue of empowering students. Teachers determine the arrangements for the school, such as library opening hours, anti-bullying policies and lavatories whilst students organise pantomime trips and discos. When Laura Clark explains that students' ideas must be *"tempered with realism"* she means a version of reality held by members of staff. It is interesting to compare this decision-making process with the more successful collaborative decision-making between members of the senior management team and other staff, as discussed earlier in the chapter. Instead of strengthening student-staff relationships, the school councils weaken them because students' concerns and opinions are devalued. In contrast, the views of staff are actively sought by the SMT and built into policy developments.

Some Reflections on Forming Relationships within the Institutional Structures of a School

Each section of this chapter highlights how relationships are integral to the institutional structures of Bowden School which in turn reflect, and are shaped by, the values and beliefs held within the school's cultures. Whilst some relationships help to increase the participation of members of the school others create barriers to their participation. Relationships based on mutual trust and respect – such as those formed amongst members of the learning support department – provide support and security. However, relationships established on mistrust and fear – such as student bullying – create hierarchies of power

and status in which some are devalued at the expense of others. The impact of certain policies and practices, however, is far more ambivalent. For example, whilst Bowden School's rules demand conformity from students by restraining their actions, they also protect their individuality by providing security. Therefore, it is the values underlying these policies and practices which require scrutiny as demonstrated in the varying quality of relationships between LSAs and classroom teachers at Bowden School. I return to the comment made by Carol Marina (LSA) as she compares herself to a teacher:

"As a person I'm the same.... I'm a human being."

Working towards more participatory relationships requires that all members of the school are equally valued whether they are students, teachers or non-teaching staff, and regardless of gender, age, ethnicity and notions of attainment or status.

CHAPTER EIGHT
SUPPORTING CLASSROOM LEARNING:
VALUING DIVERSITY?¹

*"The main work of schools occurs in classrooms,
yet classrooms are the part of the school which school
leaders are least able to influence and change."*

(Hargreaves, D., 1999, p.63)

It is a truism that we learn from every experience we have, however banal or unpleasant. In Bowden School learning takes place constantly in its playgrounds, canteens, corridors, assemblies and on journeys to and from the school. This chapter, however, focuses on those policies and practices which are directly concerned with supporting formal teaching and learning in classrooms: what Hargreaves refers to as the *"main work of schools"*. He also notes that classrooms are places in which, on a day-to-day basis, headteachers do not necessarily exert much influence. Teachers shut the door, metaphorically and often literally as well, and get on with their job. Because of this, classroom activities are revealing of members' deeply held beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning. Attitudes to student diversity can also be scrutinised, including notions of success and failure and 'normal' and 'other'. Therefore, throughout the chapter I examine how classroom policies and practices both support the participation and learning of students as well as form barriers to their participation and learning.

¹ This chapter draws on an earlier paper: Black-Hawkins, K. (2001a).

Structuring the Timetable for Classroom Learning

This section considers the construction of Bowden School's timetable: its daily, weekly and yearly structures. I begin by exploring how it is part of the school's rituals, deeply embedded in its cultures, unquestioned by staff and students alike even whilst shaping their everyday experiences. I also examine a number of factors that help to determine its complex organisation. I then discuss some of the ways in which the school's timetable groups students together to learn. I argue that these decisions are always responses to student diversity, whether to promote it or reduce it. I end the section by focusing on how students are selected according to notions of 'ability'. I argue that compromises and inconsistencies both in the overall structure of the timetable and in the grouping of students reveal ambiguities about teaching and learning and are demonstrations of how students are valued and devalued within the cultures of the school.

Determining the construction of the timetable

The timetable for Bowden School shapes the daily, weekly and yearly patterns of staff and students. The ritual ringing of the bell measures time passing as it signals the end of one lesson and the start of the next, the beginning of lunch or the end of the day. It is difficult to conceive of a school like Bowden without such a timetable: this institutional structure is accepted by its members without question. Its intention is to organise teaching and learning into a coherent pattern that fulfils the governmental demands of a National Curriculum as well as the expectations of parents/carers, students and staff.

All students in years seven to nine follow a curriculum comprising twelve subjects: English, mathematics, science, modern languages (French and

German), design and technology, history, geography, religious education, expressive arts, music, physical education and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Figure 8:1 shows a year seven timetable for 1998.

Figure 8:1 Timetable for year seven students at Bowden School								
	1	2		3	4		5	6
MON	English	Maths	K	History	Science	H	Expressive arts	Expressive arts
TUES	Science	French	A	Maths	English	C	Design & technology	Design & technology
WED	Music	Religious education	E	English	Maths	N	Geography	Science
THUR	Science	PSHE	R	French	History	U	Maths	English
FRI	Physical education	Physical education	B	French	Geography	L	Music	PSHE

By years ten and eleven students have some choice over the subjects they study although in practice this is really about choosing to *stop* studying certain subjects, see Figure 8:2. Most students take nine subjects at GCSE although some take ten. As can be seen in Figure 8:1, Bowden School's timetable comprises six lessons a day with each lesson lasting for fifty minutes. However, this apparently simple structure belies its complexity. At any one time up to fifty-seven classes are being taught and during the course of a week approximately 1770 lessons take place. A range of factors determines its construction, as members of staff, students, rooms and curriculum subjects are juggled into a coherent whole.

Figure 8:2 GCSE choices for years 10 and 11 students at Bowden School

Core curriculum:	Plus one from:	Plus one from:
<p>English; English literature; mathematics; science (double); modern languages (French or German); design and technology (business, food, technology or textiles).</p> <p>Plus non-examined: physical education; careers; PSHE; religious education.</p>	<p>Geography; history; religious education.</p>	<p>Art and design; music; drama and theatre arts.</p>

Because of its complex nature, pragmatism necessarily plays a part. For example, music is taught in smaller size groups not only because students are deemed to require more individual attention from a teacher in this subject than in some others but also because of practical constraints imposed by the availability of equipment like keyboards. Furthermore, the reason why religious education is also taught in smaller size groups is because it is paired against music on the timetable. As Mary Butler, one of the two deputy headteachers responsible for timetabling, explains:

"They sit neatly together on the timetable because of the amount of allotted time which they are given. So that's why RE benefits from a small group... whereas music... needs it... Normally you have nine classes and... they get eleven."

The pragmatic value attached to the concept of "neatly" is illustrated by this later extract from the same interview in which the complexity of the timetable is further revealed.

"This summer... I had to completely rethink the year nine timetable... English and maths affect one another... they are C and D... Expressive arts and design and technology are A and B... They're exactly the same. If they start making changes they've got to let each other know. So you've

got A and B, C and D... And if you change a modern languages group you've also got to make sure science, music, RE, PSHE, and humanities know because... the way their time allocations fit has a knock on effect. So modern languages could sit opposite science; science may occasionally sit opposite humanities; humanities may sit opposite PE... Backwards and forwards you go. And if one of those subjects changes a single student it has knock on effects on all the others. OK?"

Another important factor, which determines the structures of Bowden School's timetable, is the force of habit and custom within its cultures. Its template of six fifty minute lessons each day, replicated every week throughout the school year, continues unchallenged by those whose job it is to construct it. At no point in my discussion with Mary Butler did she question whether or not its long-standing format remained the best way to support students' learning. Its basic shape, commonplace in English secondary schools, reveals beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning deeply held within the school. The primacy of subject specialisms and the autonomy of the classroom teacher ensures that the model of one class - one teacher is accepted by staff and students alike. Although some subjects are 'blocked' on the timetable across half-year groups, this is to allow setting and/or smaller class sizes rather than flexible approaches to teaching and curriculum areas. During my time at Bowden School I never supported a class in which cross-curricula activities or team teaching took place.

Government legislation also has a clear impact on the organisation of the school's timetable. Most directly, the subject choices for years seven to eleven are largely determined by the regulations imposed by a national curriculum, introduced in 1988. Students have very little choice about what subjects they study because the school has little choice about those it is able to offer. Arguably, in some ways this is inclusive: it ensures a broad and balanced

curriculum in which all students are entitled to participate. For example, until the advent of a national curriculum some students at Bowden School were not able to study French or German because of perceptions about teaching modern languages to students considered to have 'special educational needs'. Now students have a legal right to learn these subjects alongside their peers. However, the national curriculum can also be seen as a barrier to the participation and learning of some students because its constraints act as a disincentive to the school to be more flexible and experimental with the structure of the timetable. This helps to strengthen the existing habits and traditions that shape its format.

Another example of how national legislation impacts upon timetabling policies occurred whilst I was working at the school. In 1998 the government altered the construction of GCSE national league tables so that the quantity of examinations taken overall had greater significance than before. In response to this change, year eleven students at Bowden School who previously took eight GCSEs, were now entered for nine or ten subjects. This is the figure generally taken at other local schools and if Bowden had not conformed, their position in the league tables might have appeared lower in comparison. To implement this change extra space had to be found on the timetable. During my first term at Bowden, there were only five lessons on a Wednesday, allowing the school day to end fifty minutes earlier. Students went home and staff remained for meetings: departmental, pastoral, and so on. By my second term this early closure was stopped to accommodate the extra GCSEs for students in years ten and eleven.

However, this timetabling change has had an impact not only on students but also on staff. Teachers resent the increase in their workload. Not only do they

have an extra lesson to prepare, teach and mark but they also have to find time for meetings after a full day's work. Whilst it would be easy to argue that most schools have equal length days, this is to miss the point. Lesson six on a Wednesday was valued both literally and symbolically as being something special about the school. It signalled the importance of meeting to discuss work with colleagues. And, in practical terms, this is now less easy for some members of staff. LSAs, for example, are not paid to attend meetings outside school hours and so the space on Wednesdays allowed them to participate in learning support department meetings. Doing so not only ensured that information and concerns about students were shared amongst members of the department but also provide LSAs with a strong sense of belonging to, and being valued by, the department: it was an opportunity for their voices to be heard. Once the timetable changed, these meetings stopped. Philip Cleary, the head of department, worked hard to find a solution to this problem but a term later none had been found. Thus changes in national league tables, brought about by government legislation, had a direct impact on Bowden School's timetable but also a more profound, albeit indirect impact on the role of LSAs in the learning support department.

Selecting students by responding to diversity

Timetabling policies determine not only which subjects are taught, how often and when, but also arrangements for grouping students together to learn. In Bowden School decisions about the latter are always based on responses to student diversity, whether their intention is to reduce diversity, for example, arranging groups so that they comprise same-age students, or to promote it, for example, aiming to balance the number of girls and boys in groups. These two particular processes of categorising and ordering students are so deeply

entrenched in the routines of Bowden School that they are barely noticed by its members.

Another criterion for responding to student diversity, which runs throughout all teaching groups at the school, is selection according to the notion of 'ability'. For some subjects, students are set into groups that represent different levels of 'ability', whilst for others attempts are made deliberately to mix classes. The former arrangement is premised on the belief that learning is most effective when students learn with those who are most like them, whilst the latter supports the belief that students learn best in classes which are diverse in their range. The school's policy is to allow individual faculties and departments to choose if and when they introduce 'setting'. Figure 8:3 shows their arrangements for 1998, according to student age.

Figure 8:3 Selecting students at Bowden School by age and attainment	
Year seven	Mixed attainment for all subjects, other than for students attending reading and/or maths workshops.
Year eight	Set in maths with mixed attainment in all other subjects, other than for students attending reading workshops.
Year nine	Set in maths, modern languages and science, with mixed attainment in all other subjects, other than for students attending reading workshops.
Years ten and eleven	Increased used of setting throughout most subjects.

When I talked to the deputy headteacher, Mary Butler, she explained to me that most lessons are taught in 'mixed ability' classes. However, as Figure 8:4 illustrates, her perceptions do not entirely match the reality of what happens in the school. For example, she described the organisation of year seven students as being "*fully mixed ability*". However, this does not take into account the reading and maths workshops run by the learning support department. These comprise a form of setting. The students who attend them are withdrawn from English and maths lessons and so in effect the workshops are 'bottom' sets for these subjects. For students who attend both they account for over a quarter of their lessons.

Figure 8:4 Lessons taught in mixed and set 'ability' groups at Bowden School				
	Not attending reading/maths workshops		Attending maths/reading workshops	
Year	Mixed ability	Set by ability	Mixed ability	Set by ability
Seven	30	0	22	8
Eight	26	4	22	8
Nine	19	11	15	15

As students get older the number of subjects set by 'ability' increases. By year nine, after two years in the school, students are set for maths, modern languages and science: that is, for over one third of their lessons and, for those students who continue with reading workshops, the proportion is exactly half. The figures for years ten and eleven are less easy to interpret. The practice in the school is to increase the amount of setting as students get older although

some subjects can not be set because the number of students choosing them are insufficient. For example, there is only one GCSE teaching group for Urdu and for music. The general shift towards setting in years ten and eleven is partly in response to successive governments' demands for improved exam results which then feed into league tables. Teachers at Bowden, like those in other schools, acquiesce in the belief that a high position in these will attract parents.

The deputy headteacher, Mary Butler, seemed irritated when I questioned her description of year seven as being *"fully mixed ability"*. Her misplaced convictions that Bowden School teaches its students predominantly in 'mixed ability' groups are enmeshed in her perceptions of the school as being one in which all students are valued whatever their academic potential. These beliefs are shared by many other staff, including those from departments which actually choose not to teach mixed ability groups. Such understandings form part of the school's mythology about itself. Members of staff in departments which do set, can be apologetic about their decisions: *"We tried mixed ability but it just didn't work"*. They recognise that 'mixed ability' occupies some form of moral high ground.

However, the mythological status of 'mixed ability' in the school is dissipated within individual departments where decisions to set or not are largely determined by the preferred teaching styles used by departmental staff. For example, I worked alongside six members of the science department, in classes of students from years seven and eight ('mixed ability') and ten and eleven (set by 'ability'). The preferred style for all six teachers – regardless of whether the class was mixed ability' or set – was to approach each group as if quasi-homogenous, directing their lessons towards some theoretical 'average' or

'normal' student. There was a heavy reliance on teacher directed questions and answers conducted from the front of the class and all students used the same materials and were given the same tasks to complete.

The argument for setting for science from year nine is that doing so allows students to work at an appropriate pace and depth: faster/deeper for the 'higher' sets, slower/less deep for the 'lower' sets. This is based on an approach to teaching and learning which only differentiates between, and not within, student groups. Although this understanding of student diversity is limited it is also, however, self-perpetuating. Because the science department's preferred teaching style is aimed at some notional 'average' student it works less well with 'mixed ability' groups than with those which are set: the margin of error is even greater. This reinforces teachers' beliefs in the value of setting by 'ability'.

The results of this logic are damaging for students' participation. I rarely supported any science lessons, whatever the class, without there being tensions between students and staff. I came to dread certain lessons. Some teachers relied on their strength of personality – and not always successfully – to maintain order in 'mixed ability' classes as students became restless and bored. Meanwhile, year ten and eleven students in 'bottom' sets were often resentful of being grouped in this way. As one boy told me when I first worked with his class: *"I feel sorry for you, you're in with the thickies now"*. Another explained that he was not going to do any work, because nobody in his class did: *"What's the bloody point, nobody's going to get a GCSE in this class?"*

Unlike their science colleagues, those in the music department have elected to teach all students in 'mixed ability' classes. However, the reasons for doing so are not to allow students to participate more actively and/or collaboratively in

their learning, even though music is arguably a subject for which such approaches would seem particularly apposite. Rather, 'mixed ability' is justified as a way of controlling students. Laura Clark, one of the music teachers in the school, explained to me that the department had tried setting but then went back to 'mixed ability'.

"The fast group... were outstanding, you could just go with them. But the bottom group... was really hard and it wasn't just... a question of lower ability it was more that the bad behaviour got lumped into the bottom set as well. And that made it very, very difficult to get round to help them all... So we went back to mixed."

The decision of members of the music department to teach 'mixed ability' classes has not, therefore, emanated from those principles loosely held within the cultures of Bowden School about valuing all students equally. Indeed, like the notion of setting, it is based on the categorisation of students. Grouping by 'mixed ability' is perceived as a way of spreading out "lower ability" students and those with "bad behaviour". Laura Clark makes clear her pleasure in the "fast group" as compared to the "very, very difficult" 'lower' groups. As a response to diversity such labelling continues to devalue some students. Therefore, although students in music lessons do not experience being in the "thicky classes" as they might in science, these attitudes within the music department continue to act as barriers to their participation.

Whilst students in lower sets inevitably describe themselves as "thick", "stupid" and "dumbos", others who are more academically successful argue that there should be more setting, in the hope that they will be protected from name-calling such as "boffin" and "square". Any of these forms of categorisations act as barriers to students' participation and learning. As discussed in Chapter

Seven, they impact upon how students identify themselves and are identified by others and how they are valued and devalued within the cultures of the school.

Approaches to Classroom Teaching and Learning

This section examines approaches to teaching and learning at Bowden School. I argue that classroom practices are dominated by teachers' concern to maintain control over students' behaviour, creating relationships characterised by mutual distrust. Lessons are frequently based around mechanical tasks that demand the passivity, and often the silence, of students and in which responses to student diversity are necessarily limited. This unwillingness to attempt more creative approaches to classroom activities forms barriers to the participation of both staff and students. I begin by examining the headteacher's aspirations to modify these classroom approaches and explore why, within the cultures of the school, such changes have been difficult to enforce. In the remainder of the section I describe four lessons: science, music, maths and food technology. The first three, in different ways, reflect the approaches noted above whilst the fourth lesson provides a vivid contrast. It portrays a class of students actively and enthusiastically engaged in their learning and a teacher willing to take risks in her teaching. I note that this is atypical of the majority of lessons which I observed whilst working as an LSA.

Taking control or taking risks

This sub-title comes from my interview with David Roberts, the headteacher, in which he described his first impressions of teaching and learning at Bowden School.

"There was a huge emphasis on control... silence was equated with work. COPYING [great emphasis]... We've tried to get people to see that this is a school with potential, kids with potential and to release that we were going to have to take some risks. But if you went through a lot of classrooms, students had a relatively passive role. The tasks tended to be: work in silence, heads down, get a bit of support in."

This was presented to me as a picture of the school from its past although it was a description that I immediately recognised since it closely matched my own observations of many of the lessons I supported as an LSA. In my journal there are very few examples of even parts of lessons in which students were encouraged to participate actively in their learning or where teachers experimented and took "risks". For example, I have already described in the previous section the preference of members of the science department for passive, quiet students.

This suggests that David Roberts, even in his position as headteacher, does not have the power to modify easily classroom practices. Their resistance to change is partly determined by the experiences and routines of individual teachers, shaped by the values and beliefs they hold about the nature of their work. Also, teachers adjust to existing patterns of practice when they join the school. Indeed, some departments, like music, have a formal house-style to which all members are expected to adhere. A newly appointed science teacher explained to me that she had tried to get her year ten class to learn collaboratively in small groups but it had not worked. They became "noisy" and "silly". She therefore reverted to the more passive style used by her departmental colleagues, arguing that the students were not accustomed to different styles of learning.

Therefore, despite the headteacher's desire for change there is still *"a huge emphasis on control"* in lessons at Bowden School. For many staff the maintenance of classroom control - and the fear of losing it - dominates teaching. Within the cultures of the school, classroom relationships between staff and students are often based on fear and mistrust. There is an assumption that some students would rather misbehave than learn and, inevitably, such expectations are at times fulfilled. The theoretical power bestowed on staff, through the system of rules, rewards and sanctions as discussed in Chapter Seven, breaks down when a teacher faces a group of students for a fifty minute lesson. I worked alongside some teachers who had complete control over their near-silent students, and others who struggled constantly to assert some order. In either case classroom rules are irrelevant: the former do not need them and the latter are unable to impose them. Once control is lost - and it rarely seems to be only temporarily mislaid - the balance of power shifts from the teacher to the students as is illustrated in the science and maths lessons described later in this chapter.

The ingredients for control, as recognised by the headteacher - *"copying... silence... heads down"* - act as barriers to students' participation and learning. The *Staff Handbook* notes that: *"Engaging and well prepared lessons will ensure higher levels of behaviour and learning"*, although it is interesting to note that even here *"behaviour"* is placed before *"learning"*. Many of the lessons I observed were, at best, dull. The tasks set were mechanical: filling in worksheets and copying from blackboards. Students were rarely given any choice about how or what they learnt. They worked on their own with little opportunity to use each other as a resource. Teacher-led question and answer sessions dominated classroom discussion with students rarely encouraged to talk about their work amongst themselves. There were exceptions: some lessons were active, engaging

and exciting, but the majority of those I observed were not. Keeping students quiet seemed often to be an end in itself, with control taking precedence over learning.

“Better” teaching and learning in science

The following year seven science lesson explores in more detail teachers’ fear of losing classroom control. The students are the same class that I introduced in Chapter Five as part of Amy Hudson’s stories. I supported them with a number of teachers, including two others for science. Their behaviour and therefore their learning varied tremendously depending on who taught them. This particular teacher, Joan Miller did not expect the students to behave or work well. Every lesson was tense with the anticipation of what they might do next.

Journal extract: year seven science lesson

Once again Joan Miller talks at them. They sit there maybe listening, maybe not. They are at least relatively quiet. Craig is banging his fists on the workbench. The noise gets louder and louder. I ask him to stop and he does but only to resume a few minutes later and this time slightly louder. We repeat this exchange twice more. Meanwhile Joan continues to talk on and on and the students seem more and more fidgety or sleepy. Craig starts to mutter and I realise that he is saying “Fuck” again and again in a monotone. I decide to move somewhere else rather than start a confrontation.

I count the number of students in the room... twenty. Five have their heads on the desks; three are writing notes to each other; two have slowly moved to the window and are waving to someone; two more are poking one another in the back and chest; and Craig is still saying “Fuck” to himself. All of these activities seem to be more attractive than listening to Joan talk about mammals. However, she seems satisfied. The room is quiet and she appears unaware of the lack of student engagement. Is her idea of a good lesson one in which she does not have to tell off anyone?

Can she imagine teaching a lesson in which students learn with enthusiasm?

She ends her talk with the far from inspirational observation to the class: "It's a long, long piece of work today so nobody is to make any fuss." Then she gives them a number of written tasks to complete for which the instructions are unclear. They involve copying sentences and diagrams from the textbook and answering questions from the blackboard. The tasks are not differentiated in any way to take account of the diversity of students. She does not seem to think that the students might learn from each other in any collaborative way. There is no discussion, only teacher directed questions and nobody really bothers to answer these.

The students are quiet and Joan Miller keeps her distance from them. If she looked she would see that those who are doing the work are completing it in a very desultory manner. At the end of the lesson Joan says to me that she thinks it went "better than usual ...seemed all right, don't you think?" I say, "yes", not knowing what else to reply.

(ref: 10/6/1)

Depending on the criteria applied, it is possible to agree with Joan Miller's assessment that this was one of her "better" lessons. Compared with, for example, the lesson described in Chapter Five, in which Amy Hudson screams "Bitch" at her, it was relatively calm. Joan Miller did not shout at the students very much, nor they at her. In this sense, both she and the students were more controlled and less distressed than in other lessons in which I had supported them. However, her idea of a "better" lesson seems to be defined by the passivity of students: *not talking, not getting out of their chairs, not taking any initiative;* or in her own words, *not making "any fuss"*. Such inactivity is necessarily a barrier to students' participation and learning.

The quality of students' learning is secondary to Joan Miller. Surviving dominates. I would have liked to interview her to explore her feelings about being regularly humiliated by this and other groups of students. I did not do so

because I was aware she was embarrassed to be observed by me as an LSA. In my journal notes I reflect on how she managed to turn up for lessons day after day expecting little teaching and learning to take place. As the term went on her lessons became increasingly ill prepared. It seemed as if there was little point in her making any effort. On one occasion a student explained politely to Joan Miller that the class had already done the piece of work she had just set them. Joan Miller shouted at the girl and called her a “*know-it-all*”. The rest of the class mechanically got on with the task even though they had completed it the previous term.

The sound of music or the sound of silence

Like Joan Miller’s science class, the following music lesson illustrates how controlling students’ behaviour is of central concern to teachers at Bowden School. However, in contrast, the teaching approach adopted by Laura Clark, and others in the music department, allows her to maintain full authority over her class. The students are given tasks that are prescribed not only for this lesson but for the whole year ahead. The objective of each lesson is to develop keyboard skills. Students work at their own pace through an individualised programme of cards which become increasingly more demanding. They each have their own electronic keyboard and a set of headphones with which to hear themselves play. Apart from this private sound they are expected to work in complete silence and to have no contact with one another. Laura Clark’s primary role, and also mine as an LSA, is to assess when individuals are ready to move on to another card. Students never listen to one another’s achievements and they are given no opportunity to shape their own learning.

The students put their bags under the tables and collect their earphones and music cards. These activities are completed quietly and efficiently although there is still the usual short burst of angry shouting from Laura Clark to get them settled. They sit down at their keyboards, plug in their earphones and start to practice their cards. All the tables are set against the sides of the classroom so the students sit in a horseshoe shape facing the walls with little opportunity for eye-contact.

There is now no talking and almost total silence, except the sound of fingers moving on the keys. Students raise their hands if they need some help or if they have completed a card. Laura and I respond in whispers. The only sound of music is when an individual student demonstrates the tune on his/her card to Laura or me. They never hear each other's successes because they are plugged into the private world of their own machines.

I watch Paul Gray [one of the students whom I am expected to support] and am surprised to see how he sways in time to the music he is playing. He appears utterly absorbed in it.

Just before the lesson ends Laura Clark tells the students to put away their earphones and cards. They do so quietly but she shouts at them all again. I wonder why she needs to do this. After the students have gone she apologises to me for "having to get angry" with them. I want to ask,
"So, why do you do it?" **(ref: 28/9/6)**

Certainly this approach to teaching is more successful than that employed by teachers such as Joan Miller, in so far as students do make progress in learning. These lessons also offer them the opportunity to play a musical instrument which, because of the cost of private tuition, would be prohibitive for many of their families. As an LSA I partly enjoyed the relative peace and calm of these lessons and maybe students, like Paul Gray, did too. However, as in Joan Miller's science lessons controlling the students' behaviour is still the primary consideration. Indeed, my behaviour as LSA was also regulated and I

did not always find it easy to fulfil Laura Clark's expectation that I would converse with students in whispers only.

The notion of silent music lessons is surprising: it is a subject that particularly lends itself to improvisation, group work and making sounds. The students at Bowden School are not only learning to play keyboard, they are also learning to conform to ritualistic behaviour patterns. Music is taught at the school in this rigid, individualistic and silent manner because members of the department believe that students can not be trusted to learn in other ways. This is illustrated in the arrangement of students so that they face a wall and wear headphones. In this way they are rendered partly blind and deaf to their surroundings. Unless they swivel in their seats they do not know for sure where the teacher is and so they do not move for fear of being reprimanded. To return to the headteacher's comments: these teachers are not prepared to *"take risks"*.

Later, in an interview, I asked Laura Clark about these teaching arrangements. She began by expressing some reservations but then changed her mind:

"There are things that if I was in charge I would do differently. I would probably attempt more group work... It's very rarely done... I probably didn't agree with that when I got here. But now I think if you are sending children off into practice rooms with drums and the such like, one, it's very difficult to assess individual input and two, I don't trust them not to mess around."

This belief that students will *"mess around"* has shaped her classroom practices, explaining her needs to shout habitually at the students at the beginning and end of each lesson even though they have rarely done anything 'wrong'.

Outside these lessons Laura Clark is an enthusiastic musician but she does not reveal this part of her identity to the students. Her experience and love of music are potentially a potent resource for teaching but she maintains a technical role only. Despite her interest in the subject she does not encourage students to be similarly motivated to play music as an enjoyable form of self-expression. She has identified them as untrustworthy - 'other' - and therefore different from herself. Such beliefs create division of 'us' and 'them' between staff and students and act as a barrier to both teaching and learning.

The mathematical power of inertia

Anita Thompson: "Jason, are you listening?"

Jason: "No."

I worked as an LSA with Anita Thompson and her class of fifteen students who formed the 'bottom' set for year ten maths. The brief exchange above and the following journal extracts demonstrate that passivity as a form of control is not only imposed *upon* students *by* teachers: it may also be chosen *by* students as a way of wresting control *from* their teacher. Indeed, this approach to learning was characteristic of many lessons I observed. Teachers would talk and students would more-or-less ignore them. This inertia gave students their own power, a form of passive resistance.

Journal extracts: year ten maths lessons

Anita Thompson asks the students to find a particular point on a graph in their textbooks. "Michelle! Put your finger on forty-five miles per hour... Michelle have you done that?"

"What?"

"Found forty-five miles per hour?"

"Yes."

"Good." Michelle's desk is visibly empty; her book is in her bag.

(ref: 3/6/2)

Another question and answer session in which nobody bothers to reply unless Anita Thompson directly asks them by name. Then they invariably answer, "I don't know, do I?"

(ref: 8/6/3)

"Jackie! Take off your coat... I've asked you twice now."

"Oh, for God's sake!"

"He won't help you."

"What?"

Jackie stares into space and her coat stays on.

(ref: 8/6/3)

In all these lessons most of the students did as little work as possible, apart from one, Emily Saunders, who sat on her own and doggedly went through every worksheet she was given. The others mainly chatted quietly to one another, made occasional but lengthy trips to the lavatory, ate their lunch, checked their make-up and chewed gum. There existed an unspoken understanding between Anita Thompson and the students: they would be relatively quiet as long as she made few demands of them. Under these terms the students had the upper hand: they would quickly and noisily rebel if she pushed any of them too far.

Indeed, the tensions that lay under this superficial calm did occasionally explode. In one lesson the class had been given their maths reports for the end of the academic year. In line with school policy they were expected to add their own comments on their progress in this subject. Many of the students approached the task with more seriousness than I would have expected. They were motivated by anger.

Journal extract: year ten maths lesson

Four students individually tell me that not only do they 'hate maths' but they also 'hate Miss Thompson'. Jason then asks how to spell 'liar': he wants to put this on his report about her. The anger of some students is

palpable. Looking at their reports I note that three have 'B' for effort; the others have 'D' ('E' is the lowest grade). They are all predicted to achieve between 'D' and 'G' at GCSE. There seems to be little extrinsic motivation to try at maths.

Anita Thompson collects in their reports, making no comments about them whatsoever, and the lesson continues drearily. Anita Thompson carries on talking even though only Emily seems to be listening. It is difficult to pin point why this is such an unpleasant lesson. The students seem bored, restless, irritable and suspicious.

(ref: 1/6/3)

This act of contributing to their reports was an empty one for the students. Whilst their usual passivity provided them with a veneer of control over individual lessons, their sense of being devalued by Anita Thompson excluded them from genuine participation. As the 'bottom' set, she and they expected little achievement in terms of formal academic success and this increased their sense of worthlessness still further. Similarly, it seems unlikely that Anita Thompson gained much satisfaction from her relationship with these students. Her sense of worth as a teacher was also undermined by these encounters.

The pleasures of pizza making

Not all classes at Bowden School provided such negative experiences as the maths, music and science lessons I have described here. However, in the vast majority of those I observed, teachers did not encourage the active participation of students in their own learning. For example, the history lesson that was described in Chapter Five as part of *Amy Hudson's Stories* avoided the tensions demonstrated so far in this chapter. This was largely because of the nature of the relationship between the teacher, Georgina Franks, and the students. Nevertheless, the teaching and learning approaches used in that lesson were

still based on all students working individually on the same tasks, with the teacher maintaining control from the front of the classroom.

My journal reveals very few lessons indeed that depart from this predominant style of teaching and learning. The most striking example of those that did were the food and technology classes taught by Sandra Stephens. I supported two of her 'mixed ability' groups, one in year eight and one in year nine. The following journal extract illustrates an approach to learning that is demanding of, as well as rewarding for, both students and staff. The subject of the lesson is pizza making. The skills being learnt are: technical, for example, the properties of yeast; practical, the preparation of foodstuffs; creative, inventing pizza combinations; and social, working supportively in groups. It would not be easy for me to provide such a coherent inventory for the three other lessons I have described in this section so far.

Journal extracts: year nine food and technology lesson

I arrive halfway through the double lesson to a room that is buzzing with activity: the whole atmosphere is busy, purposeful, and relaxed. Sandra Stephens efficiently moves around the room calmly tweaking pizzas into shape and putting right imminent disasters. The students are working in groups of three, four or five. Each has separately designed, prepared and cooked his/her own pizza but the group setting provides encouragement and ideas. These groups are also expected to organise themselves to get their washing up completed, dishes put away and work surfaces cleaned. They impose rules on each other to ensure that these tasks are done so that Sandra Stephens rarely needs to remind them to do so.

When the first pizzas are taken from the ovens there is huge interest within and across groups. Some are most inventive, a few rather bizarre. Sandra Stephens assesses each one verbally. She offers suggestions to improve techniques but she does not ridicule even the strangest pizza combinations. The students looked pleased with themselves and each other. The following pizzas emerge early on:

- *mashed potatoes, sausages and beaked beans;*
- *icing, melted marshmallows, pineapple and grated white chocolate;*
- *strawberry Angel Delight, fresh strawberries and chocolate sauce;*
- *banana, curry powder and a whole bulb of garlic.* (ref: 29/6/2)

This lesson was typical of those I observed Sandra Stephens teach. Her response to student diversity was to give students choice and the opportunity to succeed at their own level. They were also expected to take responsibility for their own learning as well as to be supportive of their peers'. Students rarely 'misbehaved' in these lessons. Sandra Stephens was warm, firm and considered in her responses. Interestingly her attitude towards me as an LSA was similar. I felt useful and comfortable in her lessons and was kept busy. Although I was nominally allocated to help one particular student, my role was to encourage all members of the class to engage in their learning. Her relationships with the students and myself were based on mutual respect and a belief in our worth as people. These lessons could be seen to match the headteacher's aspirations for the future of the school: they were active, noisy and risky. Ironically, Sandra Stephens is firmly part of the school's past as well as its present. She first joined Bowden School twenty-six years ago when it was a secondary modern.

Providing Additional Classroom Support

Bowden School offers a range of provision for individuals and groups of students who are considered by staff to require additional support. For example, in Chapter Six I discussed the school's mentoring scheme, in Chapter Five I referred to the 'Alternative Curriculum' for students perceived to be at risk of permanent disciplinary exclusion and earlier in this chapter I considered 'reading workshops' for students with low literacy skills. The focus of this

section, however, is the provision made to support the learning of students within mainstream classrooms. I begin by examining the policies and practices for providing in-class support by members of the learning support department. I explore some unresolved ambiguities in the role of LSAs and argue that these have led to practices in which the participation of *all* students is affected, both positively and negatively, and regardless of whether or not they have been targeted for support. I then examine the policies and practices of the language support team. I note similar tensions and ambiguities between this provision and that of the learning support department.

The provision of in-class learning support

The unequivocal purpose of providing in-class support at Bowden School is to increase the participation and learning of students in the classroom. However, as the school policy statements in Figure 8:5 reveal, there are a number of ambiguities that remain unresolved. In particular, do members of the learning support department focus their work on supporting staff or students? If the latter, do they support all students or only those designated as having 'special educational needs'? And, is the subject teacher or the LSA responsible for the classroom learning of certain students?

Figure 8:5 Bowden School's policy for providing in-class support

- *Every member of staff is directly responsible for meeting the needs of all students.*
- *Learning Support Centre staff have a responsibility to support teachers in a whole-school approach towards meeting special educational needs.*
- *Purpose off [LSA] job: to assist in the support of pupils with special educational needs to enable them to access the curriculum as fully as possible.*

Thus, whilst all staff are reminded that they are responsible for the learning of everyone in their lessons, some students are separated out as requiring the particular support of LSAs. The *Handbook* also proposes that teachers should be supported to ensure “a whole-school approach” towards such students. This suggests sharing and developing professional expertise and skills between members of the learning support department and subject teachers to enable all staff to become increasingly confident and competent at working with a wider range of students and so presumably reinforcing teachers’ responsibility for all students. Meanwhile, there has been a policy within the school to increase the number of learning support assistants. They now comprise ten out of a total of fourteen members of the department. Within their job description there is no reference to them passing on their knowledge and experience to teaching staff and, because of their non-professional status, as discussed in Chapter Seven, their skills and knowledge are not always welcomed or even recognised by classroom teachers.

During my time at Bowden School I worked with twenty-one different classes. For each one, Philip Cleary, the head of the learning support department, gave me the names of one, two, three or four students who were considered to be experiencing learning difficulties. I could help others, when appropriate, but in practice my first responsibility was to these named students. Class teachers also expected me to focus on those students identified as having ‘special educational needs’. Some staff wanted me only to help them, whilst others expected me to work with students more generally if I had the time to do so.

I was only once assigned to a class specifically to support a teacher and this was because she was experiencing some discipline problems. The class had

already been allocated one LSA to work with two students who were on the school's 'special educational needs' register. With three members of staff working together it might have been possible to collaborate on classroom management issues and be more creative about teaching and learning approaches. However, this never happened. The teacher continued to teach in the same manner. Indeed, it was never explained to her why I had been placed in her lessons. My role was to protect certain students from getting 'told off' and being put at risk of being excluded from the school. My LSA colleague and myself were a wasted resource in terms of supporting the participation of students: very little teaching and learning took place in these lessons, despite the presence of three adults.

During my six months at the school no teacher suggested that we work collaboratively to support the learning of students in their classes. They did not draw on my expertise, skills and growing knowledge about individual students, nor did they offer ideas of their own. Only one teacher, on one occasion, asked me to look at the work she would be covering in future lessons. I was never asked to help produce differentiated materials. These experiences highlight ambiguities in the understanding of both teachers and LSAs about the purposes of in-class support at Bowden School. Whilst the work of the latter undoubtedly increased the participation of students in some ways, at the same time it also acted as a barrier to their participation. Figure 8:6 summarises some of the inconsistencies that I encountered in my work as an LSA at Bowden School.

Figure 8:6 Increasing or reducing students' participation at Bowden School

1. (a) Increasing students' participation in the curriculum:

- Asking students questions and clarifying their concerns;
- Reading texts to/with them – worksheets, blackboard, text books;
- Advising on the structure, content and mechanics of written work;
- Supporting practical tasks in e.g. science and food technology.

1. (b) Reducing students' participation in the curriculum:

- Students who are supported receive less help from the class teacher than other students even though the teacher has a greater understanding of the subject and the tasks set than an LSA.
- Subject teachers do not always find out which aspects of the learning tasks are causing students difficulties and so do not have an opportunity to reflect on and adapt their teaching approaches for future lessons.

2. (a) Forming supportive relationships with students:

- Providing security; building self-esteem; helping students to manage their behaviour; avoiding conflict between them and other students and/or class teacher.
- Getting to know students' interests and concerns over time and across subject areas; forming relationships with students which are qualitatively different from those they form with class teachers. (E.g. I worked with three students, first in year seven then in year eight, for science, maths, history and geography and with six different teachers.)

2. (b) Forming exclusive relationships with students:

- Students become over-reliant on help of an LSA, expecting / wanting her to do the work for them; this undermines their confidence rather than developing it.
- Students sometimes seem awkward and embarrassed to be supported in their work. This too seemed likely to undermine their confidence.
- Students are less likely to ask their peers for help with their work and so were excluded from a useful learning resource.

3. (a) *Releasing the subject teacher to spend more time with all students:*

- Working with those students categorised as having 'special educational needs' allows the class teacher to spend time with other students.

3. (b) *Some students are not given as much support as others:*

- The line dividing those students who receive additional support from those who do not, is necessarily arbitrary. I observed students struggling with aspects of their work and neither the class teacher nor myself had time to help them.

When I asked students about being supported in their lessons their comments confirmed these points. For example, in the group interviews with students from year eight, only ten out of thirty-seven said that they would ask an LSA to help them with their work. Most of them considered LSAs to be irrelevant to their classroom experiences: helping only those whom they described as "*can't read or write properly*," "*a bit slow*" or "*the thickies*". Not surprisingly, some students resented LSAs even looking at their work or sitting near them in lessons in case their friends thought they fitted these categories. One boy, who was targeted as requiring in-class support, explained that LSAs sometimes hindered rather than supported him:

"Sometimes when you're getting on with your work... the learning support person just comes over and starts talking. And you don't need it. It's annoying... they stop you... It's embarrassing, too."

In contrast, other students expected LSAs to work exclusively with them. The following extract from my journal refers to Amy Hudson, some of whose stories I have already told in Chapter Five:

"Amy complains very loudly every time I try to speak to Kathryn. I explain that my job is to work with anyone who asks for help. Amy bursts into tears and starts sucking her thumb vigorously." (ref: 28/9/1)

Another student, Jake Watkins, frequently attached himself to me as well as to other LSAs at the end of lessons. He followed us around the school site, seemingly unable to manage without our 'support' even when outside the classroom.

These ambiguities about increasing and reducing students' participation through in-class support arise out of, and reveal, the sometimes contradictory beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning, held by members of the school. Whatever the rhetoric of school policy, underpinning the way in which learning support is organised is the notion that there are some students in the school who need extra help and there are others who do not. These two broad groups are roughly divided into those who are categorised as having 'special educational needs' and those whose educational needs are not 'special' or 'other' but are 'normal'. This division acts as a barrier to the participation of all students because it does not allow for their range and diversity. It encourages notions of 'same' and 'different'; 'us' and 'them'.

This (mis)understanding of students, held by both class teachers and members of the learning support department, is premised on a deficit model of learning. Difficulties are considered to be due to deficits in students' academic attainment, behaviour, social background and so forth. This belief acts as a barrier to learning because it does not take account of the context in which learning, as a social interaction, takes place, including the role of the class teacher. A student is somehow responsible, even possibly to blame, for the difficulties s/he is experiencing. LSAs are therefore assigned to named students to help compensate and put right their deficit. This carries echoes back to old-style 'remedial' departments in which staff provided a 'remedy' for students' problems.

Within this model of teaching and learning, and regardless of the school's policies, some class teachers do not believe themselves to be responsible for the learning of those students' who are supported by an LSA in their lessons. This acts as a barrier to student learning in a number of ways. It perpetuates notions of 'normal' and 'other' and in doing so further inhibits the participation of those students who are supported. It also allows teachers to consider the rest of the class to be a fairly homogenous group of students. This discourages more creative ways of teaching which draw on the diversity of students in the class; for example, using group work, peer support and so on.

Meanwhile, categorising students in this way enhances the sense of self-worth held by members of the learning support department. They believe themselves to have valuable specialist skills and knowledge, which are not shared by other members of staff. And, by colluding with this, teachers are further able to abdicate responsibility for teaching certain students. This de-skills teachers whilst at the same increases the status of the learning support department. 'Normal' students can be taught by 'normal' teachers, but 'special' students require 'special' help from LSAs.

At the same time, some teachers at Bowden School identify themselves professionally in terms of their autonomy and independence in the classroom. These values are bound up in their fundamental sense of themselves as teachers. Whilst the work of LSAs is welcomed in principle, having another adult in the classroom is antipathetic. The dissonance caused by two clashing sets of beliefs is scarcely recognised in the school and yet LSAs have to negotiate its implications every time they support a lesson in which it plays a part. Such difficulties not only form barriers in the relationships between class

teachers and LSAs, as already discussed in Chapter Seven, but also necessarily impact upon the learning and participation of students.

Within the limitations of these contexts, however, the vast majority of staff ask for LSAs to work with students in their lessons. As Philip Cleary, the head of the learning support department, explains:

"The staff... recognise that there are a lot of students who need support... There has always been this ethos of supporting students and doing as much as possible for them... I've not known a school like it."

He argues that if he were able "to double, or even treble" the number of staff in his department he still could not match all the demands made of him.

"That is a drawback. The more successful we are the more the staff are going to rely on us to do the work... There are times, with... stresses... and dealing with certain kids, when I think why... am I putting all this effort into that one when there are good kids out there who get no support at all? Who perhaps aren't even recognised as being normal, well behaved, well adjusted?"

For Philip Cleary, the problem is irresolvable. There are too many students perceived by staff as needing support and his department is not large enough to provide for them all. Thus, the "success" of the current arrangements is also its failure: leading to the stigmatisation of some students whilst their more "normal" peers receive no support at all.

The provision of in-class language support

Eleanor Wharton is head of the language support team at Bowden School. Working with her is Sofia Begum, a language support assistant, who speaks Punjabi. They are also able to draw on the resources of an LEA home-school liaison officer who has responsibility for a number of schools in the area. About

ten per cent of Bowden's intake are on the school's register of "bilingual or black students". Ten years ago the figure was closer to twenty per cent.

Historically, the language support and the learning support departments had worked independently of each other, however there is now greater collaboration between them. This development is partly due to staffing changes. Before coming to Bowden School both Eleanor Wharton and Philip Cleary had worked in schools in which language and learning support were one department. Political changes at a national level, resulting in legislation such as the introduction of Section 11, have also helped these shifts in thinking. Furthermore, there has been a steady decrease in the number of students at Bowden School who speak English as an additional language. Pragmatically, this has made it increasingly infeasible to teach these students in language classes separate from mainstream lessons.

Eleanor Wharton tells some of this story:

"Bowden originally had a language support department which withdrew students... With section 11 there was a move away from that... to support in the mainstream, although it was still going on here... Then about six years ago there was a big changeover in the school and learning support students started going into mainstream classes... There was a lot of conflict because language support resisted children going into reading workshops and being identified as having learning needs... There was resentment between the two departments. When I came I tried to build bridges because at my last school ... language support was part of learning support. There is a need to work together because there are students who have both [language and learning needs]... you're in the classroom and you can support generally as well, and we have the same sort of aims."

Philip Cleary has a similar understanding of the past:

"When I first came here I couldn't believe there was language support and learning support and there wasn't just one department headed by one person... Historically it's not been good, because of the staff involved... but Eleanor's been a breath of fresh air... Her way of working with students is the same as ours. She's there for targeted students but also for the rest of the class and the teacher as well... So she won't just sit down next to somebody and only concentrate on them. As you've seen she goes around the class helping different people."

Eleanor Wharton describes the learning support department as, *"very welcoming"*. They collaborate on the writing of students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and they work out their departments' timetables together so that they can, in Eleanor Wharton's words, *"share the load"*. As Philip Cleary explained, *"Eleanor's helped me out by targeting some students who I would have been targeting had I got staff in those lessons."*

In the section of the *Staff Handbook* entitled 'Language Support Team' the following aim is given:

"The Team exists to raise the achievement of bilingual students within the context of the mainstream curriculum and to make access to the full curriculum possible by:

Working alongside teachers in the classroom in a variety of ways, including partnership and collaborative teaching, which is responsive to the language needs and abilities of ALL students. The team is also able to provide differentiated materials where appropriate."

This policy statement highlights clear similarities between the language support and the learning support departments in their approaches to the provision of in-class support. Whilst this has sustained their joint collaborative working practices it has also resulted in them sharing similar tensions in their relationships with teachers elsewhere in the school.

When Eleanor Wharton describes working alongside other staff, her experiences correspond to those given by LSAs earlier in this chapter. Like them, she argues that *“Most teachers are willing to have you in the classroom”* but also *“There are those who use you better than others”*. For both departments, the dilemmas between working with teachers and/or working with students, as well as between working with all students and/or working with a targeted group, remain unresolved. As with LSAs, the quality of the relationship between individual classroom teachers and the member of the language support team is important and this is shaped by teachers’ deeply held beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning. As Eleanor Wharton notes:

“There are some teachers who you’ll never change. They have a very narrow minded view of teaching. They aren’t... willing to try new things.”

This resistance to change echoes back to the words of the headteacher, David Roberts, when he voiced his initial criticisms about teaching in the school and argued that needed to be prepared *“to take some risks”*. Until these concerns are addressed, the potential of many students at Bowden School and not only those who speak English as an additional language, will remain constrained.

Some Reflections on Supporting Classroom Learning and Valuing Diversity

Each section of this chapter highlights how certain beliefs, held within Bowden School, shape classroom learning experiences. The primary response to diversity is to select, order, rank and label students. Difference is a problem to be solved rather than a rich resource on which to draw. This is seen in timetabling arrangements, teaching approaches and the provision of in-class support by the learning support department. These are all demonstrations of

how students are valued and de-valued. Underlying such categorisations, and held within the understandings of many members of staff, is the concept of a 'normal' student. The prevalent teaching style in the school takes little regard of the diverse range of students in any class. Whether teaching groups are set by 'ability' or 'mixed', lessons are directed at some notional middle ground with all students being given the same tasks to complete. Such inflexibility impedes the participation of students in their learning.

This approach to teaching also reflects another dominant belief held by staff: that their primary role is to control the behaviour of students. Lessons that are quiet, undemanding and passive are used to assert discipline. The lack of mutual trust and respect between teachers and students dominates classroom interactions and creates a powerful barrier to the participation and learning of students. This 'house-style' of teaching is a potent force within the cultures of Bowden School. The headteacher's attempts to modify it have been far from successful and new teachers learn to adapt when they join the school.

Within this context, in which students are categorised as 'normal' or 'special', and teaching approaches are dominated by control and fear, the learning support and language support departments can only tinker at the edges of increasing participation and learning in classrooms. The long-term solution lies in restructuring these departments and their role within the wider context of the school: drawing on the rich diversity of *all* staff – teachers and support staff – as well as students. However, the organisation of the timetable and the unquestioned belief in the autonomy of classroom teachers are formidable barriers to any such developments.

CHAPTER NINE

ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*"The schools and classrooms we had visited and observed
exist in the real world, not in visionary imaginings.
They are the constructs of living, fallible people."
(Cooper et al, 2000, p.195)*

The purpose of Chapter Nine is to consider how far, and in what ways, my findings from the case study of Bowden School, together with my reading and the *Autobiographical Tales*, have contributed to answering the research questions. In doing so I have kept in mind the comment by Cooper *et al*, which opens this chapter. As with all the schools referred to in the thesis, Bowden is peopled by 'real' staff and students who are getting on with the complex and sometimes difficult business of living their lives. The analysis of my findings sets out to reflect this. The chapter is divided into three sections, each of which relates to one of the questions. A summary of these, as already presented in Chapter One, is reproduced in Figure 9:1.

Figure 9:1 Summary of the research questions for the study

1. What are school cultures?
2. What is participation?
3. To what extent can the concept of school cultures contribute to the understanding and development of participation in schools?

Determining in which section to place my analysis was not always straightforward. My developing understanding of the relationship and interconnections between the concepts of school cultures, participation and

barriers to participation added to the ambivalent nature of such decisions. Some findings seem to contradict others. However, I have tried not to obscure the ambiguities and disparities found in the case study but rather to examine what they contribute to the thesis as a whole. Therefore, in answering the research questions it is not always possible to provide unequivocal solutions. Recommendations for further research are presented in the final chapter of the thesis.

What are School Cultures?

In the introduction to the thesis I explained that a starting point for this study was my strong dissatisfaction with how the concept of school cultures has been presented in educational discourses. I discussed this further in Chapter Three, noting that the complexity of the concept has often led to a lack of clarity and/or partial definitions. Also in some areas of research, most notably those within the so-called 'effective schools movement', the concept of culture has been used to compare schools in a reductionist manner as a way of seeking 'quick fixes' to narrow notions of success (Elliott, 1996). Such approaches ignore the multi-layered and shifting nature of the relationship between real schools and the societies of which they are a part (Scott, 2000).

In this section, through an analysis of the case study of Bowden School, I consider what I am able to contribute to this debate. To clarify what I mean by the concept I examine school cultures in three ways as summarised in Figure 9:2, although all are closely interrelated. For example, I argue that the cultures of Bowden School are constituted through time: pasts, presents and possible futures. However, this element also helps to explain how its cultures are reproduced as well as how they change.

Figure 9:2 Understanding Bowden School's cultures

- How school cultures are constituted
- How school cultures are reproduced
- How school cultures are changed

How are the cultures of Bowden School constituted?

To answer this question I partly return to the six elements that I identified in Chapter Three as a way of understanding how cultures are constituted (see Figure 3:1). I consider each in terms of what I have learnt from the case study of Bowden School as well as my reading and the *Autobiographical Tales*. I also address gaps and inconsistencies in this set of elements that have arisen in the light of my developing understanding. Of particular significance are two additions to my original discussion. These are first, the relationship between cultures and members' emotions and second, the notions of values and beliefs. Figure 9:3 provides a summary of these eight elements.

Figure 9:3 Constituting Bowden School's cultures

- How cultures are bound by time and space
- The relationship between cultures and individuals
- Identity and belonging
- Language and ideology
- Power and control
- Behaviours, 'normal' and 'other'
- The relationship between cultures and emotions
- Values and beliefs

School cultures are bound by time and space: Both the case study of Bowden School and the *Autobiographical Tales* illustrate the profound way in which a school's present cultures are partly constituted by its history as an institution and also by the collective pasts of its members. These shape its possibilities for change and reproduction and therefore help to determine its cultures in the future. In understanding its cultures, time and space can not be easily separated. The cultures of Bowden School are also constituted by the literal spaces that it occupies as an institution: its classrooms, staffrooms, corridors, playing fields and playgrounds. These too have their histories. Its cultures are necessarily constituted by the worlds outside its gates. Students and staff bring their lives – their 'ghosts' – past and present as well as aspirations and fears for the future into the literal and metaphorical space of the school. Similarly, the cultures of the school are permeated by other external worlds and their histories and these are local, national and global in dimension.

The relationship between cultures and individuals: Bowden School's cultures are also partly constituted by the lives of its individual members. Without students there would be no staff and without either there would be no school. In Chapter Three I discussed some of the difficulties in exploring this relationship. I suggested that, on the one hand, it is necessary to take into account the social structures by which people might identify themselves or be identified by others, such as gender, class, ethnicity, dis/ability and so forth. On the other hand, I suggested that doing so can lead to stereotyping of individuals as well as presenting a reductionist view of people's lives. In the case study of Bowden School this dilemma remains. However, I no longer think it is appropriate to attempt to resolve these tensions: they exist not only

within the debate around what constitutes a school's cultures, they are actually *part of* the cultures of a school. In Bowden School they are manifested in members' attitudes towards and valuing and devaluing of others. For example, its policies and practices must acknowledge the diversity of its members but without allowing differences, or perceptions about differences, to constrain opportunities for and expectations about individuals and groups.

Identity and belonging: The relationship between cultures and individuals can be further understood in terms of identity and belonging. In Chapter Three I emphasised the connections between how people identify themselves and how they are identified by others, or what Bhabha (1994) calls "*identification*". Through an analysis of the case study of Bowden School I have developed my thinking away from seeing identity and belonging in schools mainly in terms of the social structures noted earlier in this section, such as gender, class, ethnicity and dis/ability, although these are undoubtedly important, for example in shaping the friendship groups to which students belong. However, identity and belonging in the cultures of a school are also part of the institutional mechanisms that order, select and label its members.

At Bowden School, with a staff of over one hundred and 1,300 students, an array of grouping arrangements is made. This is a fundamental feature of the school's cultures and, indeed, all six schools that comprise the *Autobiographical Tales*. Students and staff are subjected to processes of "*identification*" in relationship to others in the school and these help to determine their sense of belonging and not belonging. It can be seen in the hierarchical organisation of staffing as well as in the ways which students are grouped together to learn and for pastoral support. Members of the school accept these systems of categorisation and yet their impact on their

understanding of who they are and with whom they belong is profound. The significance is not that such arrangements are made but how and why they are made. The cultures of the school legitimise the creation of differences between members which inevitably values and devalues some more than others.

Language and ideology: The case study illustrates the extent to which Bowden School's cultures are partly constituted by the language of recent governments' ideologies. Even though many members of staff are critical of national education policies, their vocabulary reflects and reproduces its values and beliefs (Fielding, 1999). For example, teachers customarily refer to "*effective learning*", "*delivering the curriculum*", "*standards*" and "*targets*". These are not expressions that were used in schools twenty years ago. When I was a teacher in the 1980s, education also had its own terminology and jargon, but it was not imposed via this centralised authority. I have chosen to address this point here, rather than in the section on how cultures change, because this ideological-speak seems to be a feature of how school cultures are now constituted in England. It is a sea change that has seeped into schools. It is firmly established in policies and practices as well as in the acceptance of teachers that government has a right to direct their professional behaviour. Staff at Bowden grumbled about league tables, SATs tests and Ofsted but there was never a hint of non-compliance.

Power and control: Whilst writing up the case study, I drafted a chapter based on the notions of power and control in the cultures of Bowden School. It became so lengthy and impinged upon so many of my findings that I decided to integrate it throughout the study. What I learnt, however, was that school cultures are thoroughly constituted through power and control: who has

power and who has not, on what authority and how and why they use their power. I have also understood more clearly the relationship between power, discipline, punishment and fear (Foucault, 1975). This is particularly pertinent to teachers' anxieties about losing control over their classes whether through the presence of an LSA or the behaviour of students. This insight has reinforced my understanding of the emotional nature of daily lives within the cultures of a school.

The use of power in the classroom also highlights the way in which the cultures of Bowden School can be understood in terms of the deep divide between many staff and students. For example, some of the lessons I describe in Chapter Seven are like strategic exercises between two opposing sides with little in common apart from the shared purpose of getting through the next hour relatively untouched. This division is more profound than any organisational arrangement as it forces teachers and students to identify themselves along notions of 'us' and 'them'. At the same time it is interesting to note that staff also describe the satisfaction of working with *individual* students, particularly in a pastoral capacity. Then they are able to form personal relationships in which the tensions of failure, fear and mistrust are dissipated.

Behaviours, 'normal' and 'other': The cultures of Bowden School are permeated with the notion of 'normal' behaviour and also therefore notions of behaviour that is 'abnormal' or 'other'. This is seen in the organisational structures discussed earlier, which set out to select and order students and thereby create categories that span a spectrum of 'normality ↔ otherness'. It is also present in the school's behaviour policy, which provides a template for what is acceptable student behaviour. 'Normality', however, is not an objective

measure. It is 'normal' for staff to choose what clothes to wear at school, to have a comfortable room to relax in at break times and to use the lavatory without asking anyone's permission. These behaviours are considered as 'other' for students. This reminds me of one of the *Autobiographical Tales* in which the deputy headteacher shouts at me for wearing red tights because she mistakenly thinks I am a student rather than a member of staff. As an LSA at Bowden School I considered the behaviours of some teachers to be 'other'. The silence of the practical music lessons still seems bizarre to me. Nevertheless, the music teachers have conformed to this behaviour and have, in turn, compelled their students also to acquiesce.

The relationship between cultures and emotions: The relationship between the cultures of a school and the emotional lives of its members is a significant development in my thinking. This has evolved during the analysis of the *Autobiographical Tales* and has then been strengthened through the case study of Bowden School. When writing and later re-reading these chapters I have been struck by the number of references I have made to people's feelings, including my own. For example, I describe others and myself as being "*angry*", "*bored*", "*amused*", "*pleased*", "*scared*", "*embarrassed*" and "*sad*". I refer to lessons in terms of "*fear*", "*laughter*", "*safety*", "*trust*" and "*tension*". I include stories that focus on the importance of friendship and the horrors of bullying and other acts of unkindness and intolerance between and amongst staff and students.

Whilst Bruner (1996) argues that cultural psychology rightly includes a consideration of the role of "*emotions and feelings*" in education (p.12), what I have described is more than this. Not only do all members bring their emotional lives into Bowden School with them each day, the activities of the

school itself creates and shapes deeply felt emotions, which can not be ignored. These responses help to form and are formed by the cultures of the school. As O'Hanlon (2000) notes:

"The emotions should not play an inferior role in our deliberations about education... Emotion and its associated moods permeate our experience and are not... interruptions or brief moments of madness that punctuate an otherwise cool and calm journey of rational objectivity." (p.23)

Values and beliefs: In Chapter Three I did not include a separate section on the notions of values and beliefs because I considered them to be at the heart of understanding the concept of culture and therefore permeating all aspects of it. However, during the process of analysing my findings from the case study of Bowden School I now consider this misleading for two reasons. First, I accept that the same argument could be applied to other elements on which I have focused, for example the notions of *power and control*. Second, I have frequently referred to values and beliefs throughout the thesis and it is this very pervasiveness which has to be considered. School cultures are undoubtedly constituted through the values and beliefs held by its members as well as by others outside the school who are nevertheless influential, such as national government policy-makers.

Recognising the importance of understanding the deeply held values and beliefs that shape the cultures of a school is not the same as finding them straightforward to identify. They may be complex, at times contradictory, often unacknowledged by individuals and seldom discussed amongst members. Some of the apparent inconsistencies I have encountered at Bowden School include:

- (i) The member of staff who is both defensive about and proud of her Irish background and yet insults Pakistani students because of their 'otherness'.
- (ii) Teachers who welcome the support LSAs provide for students whilst being hostile to the loss of classroom autonomy.
- (iii) The headteacher who argues against the marketisation of schools by national governments but describes his own school as a "*product*" he can "*sell*".
- (iv) Students who refuse to work in maths lessons but are distressed when predicted low grades at GCSE.

Regardless of such inconsistencies, the values and beliefs held by individuals and groups within the school, help to form its cultures. Those with greater power in terms of status or numbers are more able to impose their values on other members. However, different contexts create different sets of dominant values. For example, whilst anti-racist beliefs shape students' behaviours when supervised by teachers in classrooms, fights between students outside the school grounds are sustained through racial tensions present in the local communities.

How are the cultures of Bowden School reproduced?

It is a seemingly paradoxical feature of cultures that their nature is to persist over time and yet be susceptible to change. In this section I consider the first half of this; that is, what I have learnt from the case study of Bowden School about how the cultures of a school are reproduced over time and transmitted from one person to another and from one group to another. To answer this question I consider three factors which have emerged from the case study and are summarised in Figure 9:4. Throughout the discussion the elements of

cultures from the previous section are also included; for example, how entrenched identities are difficult to modify and how power and control may be used to sustain cultures as well as to change them.

Figure 9:4 Reproducing Bowden School's cultures

- Myths and stories, telling tales
- Rituals and habits, repeating ourselves
- Resisting change, avoiding risks

Myths and stories, telling tales The cultures of Bowden School are reproduced through its institutional myths and stories, developed over time and space. Myths tell partial truths but their existence helps to reinforce the values that they transmit. This is illustrated in the myth of the *boys' grammar school* which permeated Hartbrook School in my *Autobiographical Tales*, even though it was a mixed comprehensive when I worked there. Similarly, for Bowden, one such myth has developed from its history as a secondary modern school. This has shaped the perceptions and beliefs of people inside and outside the school, influencing both the composition of student intake as well as the teaching styles and expectations of staff. Indeed, these two forms of reproduction feed each other. The creaming off of 'academic' students to schools like the Cathedral lowers expectations about achievement in Bowden School and the ensuing league table results reinforce perceptions both within the school and its local communities.

This understanding of Bowden School is strengthened further by its reputation for being successful with students who are considered to have 'special educational needs'. Primary schools recommend Bowden School to parents/carers of students in year six when there is concern about their

learning and/or behaviour difficulties. Members of the local education authority pressurise the head of Bowden's learning support department to include students who are not easy to place in other schools. This is exacerbated by their status as an 'enhanced resource' school for students who are designated as having 'moderate learning difficulties'.

There are other local myths which influence some parents/carers' decisions about the school to which they send their children: that students at Bowden come from socially deprived families, that they 'mess about' in classes and fight outside the school. Like many myths there is an element of reality in these stories. Some students, some times, do disrupt lessons and engage in conflicts in the streets nearby. However, such tales are based on stereotypes which by their nature are also untruths.

There are also stories which are maintained by members *within* the school and these too help to reproduce its cultures. Members of staff identify themselves as belonging to a school that values and cares about all students equally whatever their academic attainment or behaviour. This is enshrined in policy documents such as those concerning the pastoral system. Again this is a partial understanding of the reality of students' experiences. The gaps between policies and practices are seen, for example, in the use of setting to organise students for teaching, in the tensions inherent in the role of form tutors and in the attitudes and reactions towards incidents of bullying between students. However, because there is a mythology of caring in the school these gaps and inconsistencies are harder to identify and are therefore more entrenched. Individual staff and students might note these problems, as some did in the interviews, but the strength of the myth prevents it from being challenged.

Similar legendary status is attributed to the learning support and language support departments whose members are perceived to be hard working and successful at managing the learning of students who are considered to be the most demanding. These too are partial truths about the school, but their strength helps to obscure possibilities for changes which might benefit all students and staff. Another truth, but one which is less easily revealed within the school, is that some classroom teachers choose to collude in the mythological powers of the support departments because by doing so they are able to abdicate responsibility for those students who they perceive as being hardest to teach. Thus the expertise of support staff becomes a comforting excuse for maintaining the status quo.

Rituals and habits, repeating ourselves: Like many schools, including the six that comprise the *Autobiographical Tales*, the cultures of Bowden are reproduced through its rituals and habitual practices. Like myths and stories, these are embedded in the past: repeated unquestioningly, day after day, week after week, and year after year. Whilst such patterns offer members the security and comfort of the known and the expected they also suppress opportunities for cultural change. Other rituals are welcomed by members *because* they are outside the habitual routines of the school: for example, sports days, end of term staff parties, student outings and so forth. These celebratory occasions strengthen members' sense of belonging.

The organisational structures of the school are permeated with customary policies and practices. The timetable is one example with its regular pattern of lessons, days, weeks and years arranged around discrete curriculum areas taught in single-age classes by one teacher. Another example is the arrangement of staff in the school: organised into management, departmental

and pastoral teams each with their own internal hierarchies. It would be inconceivable to staff and students at Bowden School to have mixed-aged classes, for instance, even though pastoral groups are organised in this way or to get rid of the position of headteacher and appoint in his place two class teachers or six LSAs.

Habits and rituals take place in the lessons too. It was striking to note the similarities between lessons taught not only by individual teachers but also across much of the teaching staff. Bowden School has developed a form of house style based on the belief that some students will 'misbehave' unless their behaviour is controlled through learning activities which demand their passive compliance. When new teachers attempt to approach their teaching differently they may encounter resistance from other departmental staff and from students. The latter are also accustomed to lessons being taught in a particular way and therefore do not expect to be active participants in their own learning. In these ways new staff and students absorb the habitual classroom practices of existing members who are then able to avoid the discomfort of change (Fullan, 1991).

Resisting change, avoiding risks: Within the cultures of Bowden School there is a strongly felt resistance to change. This underpins and is underpinned by its myths and stories as well as its habits and rituals. This is not to argue that change is not part of the school. Like all schools in England it has a formal *School Development Plan* and *Ofsted Action Plan*. However, these do not address the deeply held values and beliefs within the school and, in terms of bringing about cultural shifts, their impact is superficial. For example, policy changes from 'remedial' withdrawal classes for a few students to the provision of learning support for all has not lead to a comparable shift

in the minds of teachers who still divide students into those who are 'normal' and those who are 'other'. Similarly, despite equal opportunities policies and personal, social and health education lessons, racist attitudes amongst some students and staff continue.

As discussed in the previous section, the headteacher's professed determination to change classroom practices has also been generally resisted by teachers. Their primary concern remains the behaviour of students and they do not equate his "*risk taking*" in the classroom as being supportive of these more urgent needs. His description of what lessons were like when he first arrived seem to describe many of the lessons in which I worked some three years later. It is interesting to note, however, that *his* perception of teaching approaches in the school has been modified. It is as if his understanding has changed: he has begun to be inculcated into the cultures and no longer sees so clearly the faults he noticed when new to the school. The behaviours he once considered to be 'other' have become more 'normal'.

However, resistance to change is also strengthened by an acceptance of the status quo within school cultures. One of the most important pieces of evidence I collected was that nobody on the staff was officially interested in what I found out about Bowden. Individual members of staff would ask informally about my perceptions but neither the headteacher nor the head of the learning support department wanted to hear or read my evaluation of their school despite being offered it. There was little sense that they might learn something from my experiences. I was student-researcher-LSA and I do not think that they expected me to find out anything more than they already knew.

This resistance to change by members of staff and their fear of risk taking is not typical of all the schools in the study. For example, in the *Autobiographical Tales* I describe some of the changes brought about in Shelbourn Village College. There the attitudes of staff towards change included fear and apprehension but also excitement and commitment. The resistance to change at Bowden School and its relationship to the reproduction of its school cultures must also be considered within the context of English schools over the last two decades in which government legislation and advice has led to continuous changes to policies and practices. Staff are demoralised and exhausted by the pressure of implementing changes with which they do not necessarily concur. The headteacher described his role as partly protecting his staff and students from these external pressures. Therefore their resistance to change is also a reaction to continuing change. However, even here there are ambiguities in so far as how the changes enforced by governments are managed within the cultures of different schools (Ainscow *et al*, 1994). For example, both Bowden and the Cathedral School have been subjected to the same pressures but the impact of these changes has been very different in each school.

How are the cultures of Bowden School changed?

The nature of this question makes it more problematic to answer than other aspects about the cultures of Bowden School. My contact with the school was over an eighteen-month period and I worked there for six months. It is difficult in that time to identify sustained cultural changes. However, I have set out to do so by considering the following three factors as shown in Figure 9:5 and by drawing on the *Autobiographical Tales*.

Figure 9:5 Changing Bowden School's cultures

- Interactions with external worlds
- Changes effected from within
- Taking a long view, the pace of change

Interactions with external worlds: Since a school's cultures are formed partly by its external worlds it seems likely that changes in these worlds will in turn shape the cultures of a school. For example, the cultures of Bowden School have shifted over time in response to successive governments' legislation and ideologies. There has been a transformation in values and beliefs resulting from the pressure of increased competition for students between local schools and the ensuing financial implications of falling and/or rising rolls. The emphasis on league tables is reflected in the continuing shift away from mixed attainment classes towards setting as well as an increase in the collection and analysis of statistics that purport to forecast students' academic potential. Time and energy is spent in maintaining the public image of the school; for example, the efforts made to attract new families to the school via Open Evenings and to monitor and control the representation of the school in the local press.

Ironically, it may be that these external pressures have also acted against change elsewhere in the school. The focus on public tests and examinations and their concomitant assessment of individual teachers' ability to get the required results may have strengthened beliefs in the value of the passive teaching and learning approaches already preferred by many staff. In this way, the headteacher's desire that staff take greater "risks" in teaching and learning in classrooms has been further inhibited.

New staff may, however, act as catalysts for change in the cultures of a school. Although the headteacher at Bowden School has not effected the development in classroom practices to which he aspired, he has in his three years made some inroads into changing the school's cultures. For example, his approachability and seeming omnipresence have contributed to more open relationships generally between members of the senior management team and other staff. He has also expanded the management and pastoral structures of the school and this has further helped to break down notions of 'them' and 'us' within the staff. However, the influence on a school's cultures of an individual outsider joining the school is largely determined by the power of that person's position. A headteacher has the authority to change policies and influence practices in the way that a newly qualified teacher or an LSA, for example, can not.

Changes in the local communities and neighbourhoods of a school also, in time, effect changes in its cultures. The cultures of Bowden School are partly shaped by its student population and this has shifted in composition since the school first opened. Since 1939, the total number of students has expanded five-fold, and the upper age has increased from fourteen to eighteen years. The proportion of students from ethnically diverse backgrounds has fluctuated: once negligible, it rose to approximately twenty per cent in the 1980s and has now dropped to about eight per cent of the student population. The area has also seen periods of relative economic resurgence and depression with associated employment and unemployment figures. This too impacts upon local families and thus on the lives which students bring into the school.

Changes effected from within: I did not observe any signs of Bowden School's cultures being changed in response to existing influences from within

the school, although it is difficult to tell over such a relatively short period of time. There are individual members of staff whose behaviour differs from others and is informed by a different set of values and beliefs; for example, the food technology teacher whose lessons I describe in Chapter Eight, *Supporting Classroom Learning*. However, these individualists do not seem to modify the school cultures. Indeed, this particular teacher illustrates this well since she is the longest-serving teacher in the school, having taught there for some twenty-five years.

Taking a long view, the pace of change: Because of the nature of cultures, change is rarely effected quickly and is therefore difficult to discern. However, by comparing the cultures of Bowden School with those of the six schools in the *Autobiographical Tales* it is possible to draw out societal shifts that have impacted on the school's cultures. For example, behaviours towards female staff and students have changed considerably. The sexual harassment of women and girls by male staff, which was considered 'normal' behaviour in some of the schools in which I taught, is no longer accepted. I observed no such incident whilst at Bowden School. This reflects a shift in society's values and beliefs, supported by national legislation such as the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act. It is interesting to note, however, an accompanying change in the behaviours of some female staff regarding the sexual teasing and harassment of male staff, for example in the learning support department.

Another change in schools' cultures that has happened over a long period and has been influenced by societal values is a fundamental shift towards acknowledging and legally protecting the rights of children. In 1959 the United Nations adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child which, whilst being a powerful moral framework, carried no force of law (UNICEF, 1996). However,

by 1989 this was replaced by the Convention on the Rights of Children, which obliged national governments to review their laws to ensure full compliance with the articles of the Convention. Sixty-one countries signed up to the Convention on its first day, including the UK government.

Only two years earlier corporal punishment had been finally abolished in UK state maintained schools, although it passed through the House of Commons with a majority of a single vote (Booth, 1992). Although a teacher never struck me whilst I was child I considered the physical punishment of students by teachers to be 'normal' behaviour: it paralleled my experiences at home. By the time I started teaching myself I was far less comfortable with the notion but acknowledged that the practice was something other teachers did. In UK schools now, it would constitute an act of assault and be viewed with horror by most teachers. This represents a fundamental shift in relationships between staff and students and the uses and abuses of power and control.

And, in a far less dramatic way, whilst the student councils at Bowden School have no authentic voice, their very existence would have been unimaginable in 1939 when the school first opened. Similarly, there are other developments to involve students in decisions about their education, such as being consulted over the constructing of Individual Education Plans and contributing to their own school reports. Whilst these too may lack real power they represent an incipient shift in the cultures of the school and are a reflection of wider societal changes.

The cultures of Bowden School will inevitably change over time in response to future shifts in societal values and beliefs, although it is not easy to predict what these developments might be. Certainly, global influences are

increasingly powerful, affecting national economies and international politics. There is increasing tension between countries of the north and those of the south, exacerbated by a widening gap between poverty and wealth. Misunderstandings and distrust between members of Islamic and Western countries and communities continue to deepen. It is not possible to anticipate how these changes will shape the cultures of a school like Bowden in twenty, fifty or a hundred years' time, except to acknowledge that they will not be the same as they are now.

What is Participation?

In the introduction to the thesis I argued that to understand participation in schools it is necessary to understand its relationship to barriers to participation. I also maintained that these interrelated processes concern all members of a school and all aspects of school life: its policies and practices, including the countless informal interactions that take place amongst students and staff. In Chapter Three I continued this discussion by examining how the concepts of participation and barriers to participation have developed out of earlier debates around the notions of inclusion and exclusion in education (Booth, *et al*, 2000). I also considered Fielding's work concerning schools as "*communities*" (1998 and 1999) and "*person-centred*" schools (2000). I drew attention to important parallels between his models and others' understandings in which the nature of relationships between members of a school is central to participation (for example, Booth, 2002). I then considered participation in terms of members' active engagement in the processes of teaching and learning: students being "*actively involved*" (Hopkins and Black-Hawkins, 1995), individual teachers' "*innovative thinking*" in classrooms (Hart,

1996) and members of staff working together as members of a *"learning school"* (Southworth, 1994).

In this section I reflect on what I have learnt from the case study of Bowden School and, therefore, what I am able to contribute to this discussion. I do so by identifying:

- (i) Policies and practices that promote processes of learning and participation: that is who participates, in what ways and why?
- (ii) Policies and practices that strengthen barriers to participation: that is, who experiences barriers to participation, in what ways and why?

However, the demarcation between the two is not always straightforward. Indeed, one of my findings from the case study is that a policy or practice may both promote greater participation as well as reinforce barriers to participation and I have provided a number of examples of this happening within Bowden School.

The section is divided into three parts, as summarised in Figure 9:6. Each one relates to an aspect of what it means to participate in the life of Bowden School, although they are closely interconnected. For example, a student may participate in that they have access to the school but her/his participation in lessons will also be partly determined by the nature of teaching and learning approaches used by staff. These, in turn, will be shaped by the recognition and acceptance of diversity within the communities of the school.

Figure 9:6 Understanding participation in Bowden School

- Participation and access: being there
- Participation and collaboration: learning together
- Participation and diversity: recognition and acceptance

Participation and access: being there

At its most fundamental level, participation requires access to a school in terms of both its physical spaces as well as the curriculum it provides. I consider what I have learnt from the case study of Bowden School about this aspect of participation and barriers to participation, by exploring the following four areas, as set out in Figure 9:7. In doing so I examine who has access to the school, who does not and why.

Figure 9:7 Participation and access: being at Bowden School

- Joining the school
- Staying in the school
- Access to spaces and places
- Access to the curriculum

Joining the school: Although it is called a comprehensive, Bowden School can not be described as fully participatory because its intake does not comprise all the secondary aged students who live in its local communities. Indeed, the term 'comprehensive' is a misnomer for the vast majority of schools in the UK. None of the secondary schools to which I refer in this study is comprehensive: neither the grammar school I attended as a girl, nor the four schools at which I taught and none of the other schools in Markston. Therefore, despite Bowden's open admissions policy, in practice there are a number of barriers inhibiting access for some students.

First, it exists as part of a system in which some students do not attend any mainstream secondary school because of their perceived difficulties in learning. In 2001, ninety-seven thousand students, or 1.2% of the total school population, attended special schools in England (Gordon, 2001). Markston

Education Authority still supports five special schools and some young people who live locally to Bowden attend these. Meanwhile, staff at Bowden School acquiesce in the belief that some students, particularly those with physical disabilities or considered to have extreme behavioural difficulties, should not attend their school.

Second, not all local parents choose to send their children to Bowden School. Some decide and are able to afford the 'privilege' of private education and thereby opt out of state schools entirely. Others choose to send their children to a maintained school which is further from their home than Bowden because they perceive it to be 'better'. So-called parental choice and the ensuing competition between schools are particularly important in the context of a city where a number of schools are in close proximity. Student intake at Bowden School is therefore shaped not only by its own admissions policies and practices but also by those of other local schools as they all vie to attract parents/carers and their children. At one level this competition is for sufficient numbers of students and at another it is for those students with qualities which are perceived as being particularly welcomed, such as academic achievement.

Staying in the school: Admission to a school does not necessarily provide students with an unconditional right to remain on its roll. Participation is therefore about students staying in a school and also being encouraged to stay when difficulties arise. At Bowden School there are a number of policies and practices that support students in this way and staff take pride in their success. Whilst permanent exclusions for disciplinary reasons are part of its system of sanctions, they are very rarely used. None took place over the six months I worked at the school and there was one in the twelve months

previously. Indeed, the local education authority uses the school when it needs to place students who have been excluded from other schools.

At the same time, remaining on roll is not the same as physically being in a school. In Bowden School *fixed-term* disciplinary exclusions are used frequently as sanctions, with a total of ninety-one during the year in which I started at the school. Whilst this practice is clearly a barrier to participation it may also help to support the future participation of some students because it may act as a trigger to help them, for example by involving their parents/carers. Students may also choose to exclude themselves through truancing, but again practices at Bowden School, through the pastoral system, exist to encourage students to attend school regularly.

Access to spaces and places: Participation in a school is also dependent on the extent to which its spaces and places are accessible and welcoming to its members. Some of the public sites at Bowden School, such as the school office and reception, are both, although other areas are less so. For example, the school site is not fully accessible to people who are wheelchair users. This is not only a barrier to the admission of some students, but also to the participation of some parents/carers and other visitors to the school, as well as limiting employment opportunities for potential staff. Other spaces in the school are unwelcoming because of the activities with which they are associated. For example, at lunchtimes the noisy, busy playgrounds can be intimidating for visitors, students and staff. The hidden spaces between teaching buildings provide refuges for some but are also used for fights and acts of bullying.

Some members of the school are denied access to certain spaces in the school, at certain times. Staff expect to have places in the school where they can relax away from students, such as the staffroom and various departmental offices. Students, however, are not given reciprocal opportunities. Even the hidden spaces noted above are patrolled by staff, albeit infrequently. Because a few students are not trusted to behave, none is allowed in the school during break or lunch times. For similar reasons, lavatories are generally out-of-bounds to students during lessons. Whilst the headteacher has the authority to walk unannounced into any classroom he chooses, it would be unthinkable for a student or member of staff to enter his office without prior warning.

Access to the curriculum: Participation is also concerned with students' access to timetabled lessons that comprise the formal curriculum of a school. At Bowden all areas of the curriculum are theoretically accessible to all students, although in practice there are a number of exceptions. For example, first, the use of fixed-term exclusions as a sanction temporarily denies access to lessons. Second, the removal of students from certain lessons for disciplinary reasons is a form of *internal* exclusion and is therefore similarly a barrier to their participation. Third, the provision of reading workshops by the learning support department requires that students with low levels of literacy are removed from mainstream English lessons. This is not dissimilar to the remedial classes I taught at Hartbrook School, although at least at Bowden the system allows the flexibility of moving in and out of withdrawal lessons. Fourth, for students who are engaged in the so-called Alternative Curriculum much of their time is spent outside the school, on work experience and other vocational activities.

The relationship between access and participation is, however, ambivalent in each of these practices. Whilst they form actual barriers to the curriculum in the short term, their purposes may be to increase participation in the long-term, or at least prevent further access being denied. It may be that a more flexible use of the timetable for some students would reduce barriers to their learning. If reading workshops lead to improvements in students' literacy skills then those students will be more able to participate in the areas of the curriculum that are reliant on reading and writing activities. Nevertheless, there is an irony that by removing students from English they are denied access to the very lessons in which literacy skills are specifically taught. Staff involved in the Alternative Curriculum argue that one of its purposes is to keep students within the education system who might otherwise not only be permanently excluded from Bowden but would also be difficult to place in any other mainstream school.

Participation and collaboration: learning together

Ensuring students' access to the curriculum involves more than their physical presence in classrooms: they should also actively engage in the process of learning (Stern and Huber, 1997). I now consider what the case study of Bowden School has contributed to my understanding of how participation and learning takes place amongst students and also amongst staff. I examine four ways in which members of a school learn together, as summarised in Figure 9:8. I argue that through the development of more collaborative practices participation may be increased and barriers to participation reduced.

Figure 9:8 Participation and collaboration: learning together at Bowden School

- Learning alongside other students
- Supporting students to learn together
- Members of staff working together
- Schools working together

Learning alongside other students: Participation in education requires students to learn alongside each other in classes. In practical terms this necessitates the organisation of students into teaching groups. The processes by which this is done may increase the participation and learning of some students and/or strengthen barriers to the participation and learning of others (Swann, 1992). At Bowden School all arrangements for teaching groups are in response to student diversity: whether to reduce it, for example by teaching students in same age classes, or to promote it, for example by aiming to balance the number of boys and girls. Similar patterns can be seen in all the schools which feature in the *Autobiographical Tales*.

If the criteria used for selection acknowledges and takes advantage of student diversity then the range of student resources available in the class is also extended. This is recognised at Bowden School and acted upon within its pastoral structures in which mixed age groupings encourage supportive relationships between older and younger students. However, there are no examples of similarly creative arrangements for teaching groups. The central organising criterion for these is the notion of academic attainment, resulting in some classes being 'mixed' whilst others are 'set' by attainment. Both

structures have strengths and weaknesses in terms of promoting the greater participation of students.

Classes that are 'mixed' attainment potentially offer a wider range of student knowledge and skills from which all may draw. Students can support each other to participate more fully in lessons through group and peer learning. However, teachers in Bowden School rarely provide such opportunities. Little account is made of student diversity with teacher-directed tasks aimed at a notional 'average' student. Lessons are generally directed from the front of the class and students are expected to work individually and often preferably in silence.

The process of 'setting' by attainment reduces opportunities for learning because the range of students is also necessarily limited. However, in the context of schools like Bowden where little attempt is made to exploit 'mixed' attainment groups it may be for some students that their participation is greater when they are in groups which are set. Whilst no class could be ever be described as homogenous in its composition, setting is more likely to suit the teaching approaches used at Bowden. However, this argument is strongly countered by the detrimental effects of setting on the attitudes of some students and staff. Whilst students in so-called top sets are more able to participate in learning without fear of teasing and name-calling from other students, those in the lower sets have poor expectations about their work. The attitudes of staff are similar: they too expect students in the higher bands to work better than those in lower sets. These barriers to participation are exacerbated further by the association between students' behaviour and the set in which they are placed.

Supporting students to learn together: Whatever criteria is used to arrange students into classes, the extent to which they will actively participate in learning will be affected by the support provided by teachers and other staff in the lessons. Some approaches to teaching and learning support greater student participation than others; group work and peer support, for example, have already been suggested. At Bowden School the lessons in which students most fully participate are those which are well prepared by teachers but which are structured so as to allow students to make collaborative choices about their learning by drawing on the existing interests, knowledge and experiences of the group. These teachers have high expectations of all students as learners and of themselves as teachers. Likewise, barriers to participation are strengthened when teachers do not plan their lessons thoroughly and students do not use one another as a resource to support learning but instead are given individual mechanical tasks to complete. Such teachers have low expectations: the success of a lesson may judged on the behaviour of students rather than the learning that takes place.

Many lessons at Bowden School fit between these two extremes, although the vast majority take very little account of the particular group of students at whom they are directed. In this way the process of learning is not about collaboration between teachers and students: teaching is *done* to students. Some teachers are scrupulous in the planning and structuring of their lessons, others less so and some far less so. For some staff the tight control of lessons is used primarily as a device to maintain discipline, with students working individually and in near silence, lesson after lesson. However, for those teachers whose lessons are poorly planned they often do experience difficulties with students' behaviour and this too becomes a barrier to the participation of all involved. Other teachers reach an uneasy compromise by

presenting structured but undemanding tasks, at which students work in a desultory manner.

Students' participation and learning in lessons is also dependent on the structures available in the school to support student diversity. At Bowden School many of its resources are directed at specific individual students through the provision of in-class support by the learning support and the language support departments. Whilst on a lesson by lesson basis this approach helps some students to complete tasks more successfully than otherwise, as a long-term strategy to support the learning of all students it is, in a number of ways, a costly and inefficient system.

First, despite an increase in the number of LSAs over recent years, it is not possible to provide the level of support demanded by teachers for all the students whom they consider to be in need of it. Second, when an LSA is present in a classroom they are then often underused. The length of my research journal is testament to the amount of time I spent *not* working alongside students, either because lessons were dominated by teachers talking or because the tasks set made my interventions inappropriate. Third, because only a limited number of students can benefit from in-class support in the form it is used at Bowden School, students are divided somewhat arbitrarily into those who are the recipients of support and those who are not. This is a barrier to the learning of all students: the former are stigmatised as 'other' and the latter do not benefit from additional support.

To increase the participation of students in lessons the co-ordination of support should focus on whole school, whole staff and whole class structures rather than individual students, teachers and LSAs. This would require

changes to teaching and learning approaches similar to the kinds of active and collaborative learning outlined earlier in this section. It would also necessitate changing working practices between class teachers and LSAs. They too would need to collaborate more closely to plan and present lessons in which they bring different skills but share responsibility for the learning of all students.

Members of staff working together: Class teachers and LSAs working together is one example of how staff can develop more collaborative practices to increase the participation and learning of students and, by doing so, also support their own professional development and learning. Like students in a lesson, members of staff in a school provide a rich resource of interests, knowledge and experiences from which all may gain through collaboration (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991). Team teaching, observing peers and sharing teaching ideas and resources, within and across faculties, are some of the ways staff collaboration can support students' learning. However, at Bowden School the autonomy of each individual teacher in his/her classroom is a barrier to forming coherent collaborative working practices amongst staff, including LSAs. Supporting colleagues to learn together is not a priority in the school.

When structured across-school collaboration does take place it is generally limited to issues that are not directly concerned with teaching and learning; for example, devising policies on student behaviour, rewards and sanctions. Otherwise support for classroom practices is usually informal, between individuals and focused on addressing specific problems that have arisen. On such occasions members of the senior management team and heads of faculties/departments are accessible to and supportive of staff who ask for help. However, this is not sufficient to develop teaching approaches, and

especially of those staff who experience difficulties in their lessons, particularly with discipline. Teachers, like the mathematician Anita Thompson, encounter certain classes day after day and week after week with little expectation that the students will benefit very much from the experience. For other teachers, like the scientist Joan Miller, the humiliation of struggling to keep order is an almost hourly ritual. They do not seek help, nor is it offered to them. They do not even consider that the presence of an LSA in their lessons might be a way of resolving some of their difficulties. Meanwhile, other staff look on with a mixture of sympathy and disdain.

Schools working together: The learning and participation of students and staff is also supported when members of staff from different schools work collaboratively together. By widening the range of resources available, both material and human, the learning experiences of staff and therefore students from all schools benefit (NCSL, 2002). For Bowden School the value of such work is evident in relationships between it and its feeder primary schools. Staff work together across the schools because they share a common focus: supporting the primary-secondary transfer of students.

Bowden's association with local secondary schools, however, is less clearly successful. Barriers to their participation, going back into the past of grammar and secondary schools, have been exacerbated further by successive governments' insistence on competition between schools. Collaboration is difficult to sustain in these circumstances. Teachers at Bowden School talk about the Cathedral School, for example, with derision. It is not possible to see how either school could consider working together. There are clear parallels between this and the relationship between Hartbrook School and other local secondary schools as described in the *Autobiographical Tales*. And, even

amongst the six schools maintained by Markston Education Authority, the spectre of falling rolls is a barrier to collaboration. Meanwhile the LEA's powers to encourage cohesion amongst local schools have been continually weakened by national legislation. In these ways, the notion that individual teachers and schools are participants in a wider education service has been undermined, and this must be to the detriment of all students and staff (Black-Hawkins, 2001b).

Participation and diversity: recognition and acceptance

This sub-title is drawn from Booth's definition of participation, as previously referred to in Chapter Three: "*I participate with you, when you recognise me as a person like yourself and accept me for who I am*" (2002, in press). Processes of participation in a school concern the policies and practices that acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate the diversity of its members, whilst barriers to participation concern those policies and practices in which differences are overlooked, misunderstood or treated with intolerance. In this section I explore participation and diversity in terms of the extent to which members of Bowden School are able to recognise amongst themselves their shared humanity whilst accepting their differences; or what Cooper *et al* (2000) refer to as "*making human sense*" of schools (p.185). To do so I focus on three sets of relationships as summarised in Figure 9:9.

Figure 9:9 Participation and diversity: recognition and acceptance within Bowden School

- Recognition and acceptance of students, by staff
- Recognition and acceptance of staff, by staff
- Recognition and acceptance of students, by students

These processes of participation and barriers to participation are sometimes difficult to identify because they are remain covert and unquestioned, nevertheless they can not be ignored since they permeate all policies and practices, including those discussed in the previous two sections. For example, decisions around access and admissions are based on the recognition of and attitudes towards student diversity. Similarly, successful collaborative learning is dependent upon members acknowledging that the diversity of knowledge, experiences and expertise amongst them is a resource that enriches the learning of students and staff, rather than a problem to be overcome.

Recognition and acceptance of students, by staff: I consider this aspect of participation at Bowden School in two broad ways. First, I explore the extent to which staff recognise and accept that whilst students *together* comprise a group separate from themselves, both are of equal worth. Second, I examine how far and in what ways staff discriminate *between* different groups of students by ascribing greater worth to some than to others. At Bowden School neither of these is wholly unambiguous. My findings highlight a range of staff attitudes and understanding towards different students extending from participatory and welcoming to discriminatory and devaluing.

Within the context of many of the lessons I observed there is a separation between students and staff, in particular teachers. This divide is partly formed by teachers' fears of students' misbehaviour, producing distrust and anxiety and shaping their approaches to teaching and learning. For some, control is asserted through tightly structured lessons allowing little opportunity for students to make active contributions. For others, control is less easily maintained and expectations about students' learning and behaviour are subsequently lowered. The passivity and inertia of students then become

acceptable products in exchange for relatively quiet lessons. Fear and distrust also encourage students to see teachers as 'other': as individuals who have the authority to control, criticise and belittle them and with whom they perceive themselves as having little in common. These separations make it less easy for members of either group to recognise the humanity of the other.

In contrast, the pastoral system at Bowden School deliberately sets out to encourage members of staff to form sympathetic, friendly, caring and lasting relationships with students. Tutors are expected to make efforts to get to know their tutees as individuals, acknowledging their 'ghosts' from home and accepting them as people. In return students generally consider their tutors to be supportive and friendly. This discrepancy in the role of teacher/tutor, remains unresolved and largely unquestioned in the school. However, in the relatively few lessons in which teachers form more participatory relationships with students they too seem to know and respect their students as individuals. And, it is, perhaps unsurprisingly, in these lessons that discipline is less problematic.

That students as a group are ascribed less worth than staff is demonstrated in the limited nature of their participation in the school's decision-making processes. The house and school council are premised on the idea of allowing some students only to experience some limited responsibilities. Staff do not actively seek the perspectives of students at Bowden School, let alone encourage them to be what Fielding (1998) describes as *"agents of their own transformation"* (p.15). This is not so much a deliberate attempt to by-pass the role of students in school development, but rather that the contribution that students can make is not recognised by staff. Students' perspectives are not

sufficiently valued and in this way they are kept on the margins of decision-making.

Members of staff also discriminate in the worth they ascribe to groups and individual students: some are valued more highly than others. This is most obvious towards students of differing academic attainments. More covert distinctions are made by some staff with regards to gender, ethnicity and social class although none of these elements can be easily separated out. They are further complicated by an association in the minds of staff between students' attainment and behaviour. The categorisation and labelling of students are part of Bowden School life. When such processes stigmatise students and constrain staff's attitudes towards them, then they are barriers to the participation of students.

Processes of selection by attainment are demonstrations of the conditional nature of being valued as a student. This is more than missing out on the resources of student diversity that mixed attainment teaching brings. It is also about the underlying preference of many staff to teach certain students rather than others. Teachers openly describe 'top' sets as being "*outstanding*" whilst 'bottom' sets are "*really hard*" and "*very, very difficult*". These are the same staff attitudes which thread through the *Autobiographical Tales*: in the setting of classes at primary school, the grammar/secondary modern divide, the supply teacher's timetable entirely constructed of 'bottom' sets at the boys' school and so on.

Recognition and acceptance of staff, by staff: At Bowden School distinctions are made between and by members of staff according to institutional structures based on management and departmental hierarchies

and statuses. These can create barriers to participation by strengthening notions of 'us' and 'them' as can be seen in the nature of the relationships between some class teachers and LSAs. Here the latter are devalued by the attitudes of the former, who in turn may feel threatened by the presence of this other adult in their lessons.

Outside of classrooms, however, status is not necessarily used as a measure of worth. Barriers are broken down by relationships based on mutual respect and a recognition that all members of staff, regardless of their position, are able to make a valuable contribution to the work of the school. Individual differences are accepted and professional friendships are demonstrated through humour and acts of kindness. The support, which is given and received, often extends to the lives of staff beyond the school gates, cutting across boundaries of professional and personal relationships. Indeed, it is just these qualities amongst staff, of accepting diversity and recognising the value of individuals, which are missing from interactions between students and staff.

There is, however, an important exception to these relationships amongst colleagues in which differences are less easily tolerated. Staff are highly critical of teachers who they perceive to be lazy and/or incompetent and who then also experience discipline problems. Thus the staff who might arguably be most in need of support seem the least likely to receive it from their peers. And, because of the associations with shame, blame and failure they are also less likely to seek the help they need and so their difficulties often remain unresolved. This is a barrier not only to their participation in the school but also to the participation and learning of the students whom they teach.

Recognition and acceptance of students, by students: For many students the quality of friendships they develop amongst their peers is crucial to their experience of being at school (Osterman, 2000). These relationships provide a sense of belonging and worth and offer safety, comfort, pleasure and amusement. Students at Bowden School generally choose their friends from amongst those whom they consider to be most like themselves; for example, in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and academic attainment. This suggests that it is not easy for students to recognise and accept the value that diversity can bring. Whilst sameness provides security of common interests and experiences it also limits the rich opportunity of wider ranging friendships. In this way it parallels the notion of mixed attainment classes in which the diversity within a group is its strength. Thus, whilst friendships demand the recognition and acceptance of others *within* the group, they can also be insular and intolerant creating barriers *between* groups and/or individuals which are difficult to break down. At their extreme, these differences can develop into bullying and other acts of intolerance, such as the fights outside the school between students of different ethnicity.

Being bullied and the fear of being bullied, as well as simply *not* making friends, are real concerns for many students. Feeling threatened, anxious and lonely are powerful emotions that form damaging barriers to participation. Students talk about such experiences with a vividness that is rarely apparent in any discussion about their academic work. This is recognised in the wording of the school's anti-bullying policy. However, in practice this policy can strengthen barriers to the participation of those students who are bullied or are the perpetrators of acts of bullying because its very existence may represent for staff the best they can do about a form of behaviour that they consider, anyway, to be inevitable. Meanwhile students believe the policy to be

ineffective, neither preventing bullying nor supporting its victims. Both staff and students therefore have a sense of helplessness and this hinders more positive action being taken.

Despite the centrality of friendships to students' experiences of school, there are no policies and practices that set out specifically to enhance peer relationships amongst students. Similarly, whilst there are, rightly, policies on equal opportunities there is none concerned with actively encouraging students to develop friendships that recognise, accept and draw on the diversity of their peers. The efforts of the language support team to celebrate cultural diversity amongst students, for example, have little impact because they are marginalised from the main activities of the school. However, the peer relationships which students formed are crucial to their sense of themselves as individuals and members of groups. They have the potential both to increase their participation in the life of the school as well as to reinforce powerful barriers to their participation.

To what extent can the concept of School Cultures contribute to the Understanding and Development of Participation in Schools?

In Chapter One I outlined my overall intentions for the thesis: that is, to examine the extent to which the concept of school cultures contributes to the understanding and development of participation in schools. In this final section of Chapter Nine I answer my third research question by drawing on an analysis of the study as a whole. The section is organised under six key points,

the first of which provides an introduction to the remaining five. Together they form the principal conclusions of the thesis.

The concept of school cultures is central to understanding participation in schools

The concept of school cultures is central to understanding processes of participation and barriers to participation in schools. All policies and practices, including the countless everyday informal interactions that take place in a school, are shaped by and managed within its cultures. And, all policies, practices and interactions impact in some way upon the participation of members of a school, whether positively or negatively and for some or for all. The cultures of a school are experienced differently by different members and these disparities are largely dependent on the ways in which members do and do not participate in various aspects of school life. Processes of participation and barriers to participation, like school cultures, are complex, messy and at times apparently contradictory. To understand them it is necessary to explore the experiences and seek out the perceptions of representatives of all members and, in particular, of those whose voices which are less powerfully heard, such as students and support staff.

Doing so requires an examination of not only who does and does not participate but also in what ways and, most importantly, why. To address this latter consideration it is necessary to scrutinise the values and beliefs held deep within the cultures of a school. For example, a school's admissions policies and practices form one aspect of participation. However, it is not enough to examine which students are admitted to a school or the ways in which access to others is denied: it is also necessary to consider *why* this

happens and the values and beliefs that underlie such actions and decisions. Understanding participation through the concept of school cultures allows a more holistic approach to a school as a place and its members as people. In this way opportunities for systemic and sustained changes become possible.

Participation in schools is shaped by members' values and beliefs

An analysis of my findings highlights how processes of participation and barriers to participation in a school are permeated and shaped by the values and beliefs held by its members. Therefore, to develop more participatory policies and practices these values and beliefs must be examined, understood, challenged and possibly modified. For example, changing the organisation of a learning support department from 'remedial' withdrawal groups to in-class support will not help to break down barriers to participation unless staff confront their existing beliefs about the nature of learning difficulties. If support staff continue to uphold the notion of a deficit model of learning and class teachers persist in abdicating responsibility for those students whom they consider to have 'special educational needs', then the support given to all - staff and students - will be limited. What is required is a fundamental shift in how the diversity of members of a school is valued as a resource to support the teaching and learning of all.

Understanding, let alone challenging, the values and beliefs held within a school is not, however, a straightforward matter. They are deeply rooted within a school and often unacknowledged by its members. One way of addressing this difficulty is to examine how values and beliefs are developed and demonstrated within the cultures of a school through both its organisational arrangements as well as the behaviours of its members. To do so it is helpful

to consider other elements which constitute the cultures a school, as discussed earlier in the chapter:

- (i) How cultures are bound by time and space
- (ii) The relationship between cultures and individuals
- (iii) Identity and belonging
- (iv) Language and ideology
- (v) Power and control
- (vi) 'Normal' and 'other' behaviours
- (vii) School cultures and members' emotions
- (viii) And, values and beliefs.

By returning to the example of introducing in-class support teaching, it is clear that aspects of all of the first seven elements are involved in understanding the values and beliefs which underlie resistance to change and developing greater participation. For instance, classrooms have a history in how they are used in time and space and this may be understood differently by students, teachers and LSAs. In-class support raises issues of power and control in lessons: how power is distributed when members of staff work together and who is in control. Understandings of this will be partly shaped by the 'ghosts' which individual members bring into school with them every day, influencing members' perceptions of 'normal' and 'other' behaviours for both students and staff. This too is connected to how members identify themselves and are identified by others and ways in which greater worth is ascribed to some than to others. The distinction between supporting all students or focusing on a few only is also bound up in past ideologies of 'special educational needs' and its accompanying language and discourses. Changing practices from withdrawal groups to in-class support may be exciting, comforting, challenging, embarrassing and threatening. These emotional

responses are often strongly felt. Shaped by members' past experiences and existing values and beliefs they too help to determine the success or otherwise of future policies and practices.

School cultures determine who does and does not participate, in what ways and why

The findings of this study suggests that to reveal the processes of participation and barriers to participation in a school the following questions must be addressed:

- (i) Who does and does not participate?
- (ii) What are the policies and practices that promote participation in a school? What are the policies and practices that strengthen barriers to participation?
- (iii) Why do these processes of participation and barriers to participation exist within the cultures of a school? Why are they sustained? Why are they changeable?

As noted in the introduction to this section, it is the 'why' questions that are most important in understanding participation, for in addressing these the reasons and purposes underlying 'who' and 'what' are more easily revealed. However, to make sense of 'why' necessitates a thorough exploration of the cultures of a school: how it is constituted, reproduced and changed. Doing so is likely to be both difficult and challenging but unless these issues are addressed attempts to develop participation in a school will be superficial.

Understanding the 'who', 'what' and 'why' of participation and barriers to participation can be addressed in three broad ways as set out in Figure 9:10.

Figure 9:10 The 'who', 'what' and 'why' of participation

(i) Participation and access: being at a school

- Who is given access and by whom? Who is denied access and by whom?
- What are the policies, practices and interactions that promote access?
What are the policies, practices and interactions that reinforce barriers to access?
- Why within the cultures of the school is greater access afforded to some individuals/groups? And, why is access withheld from some individuals/groups?

(ii) Participation and collaboration: learning together at a school

- Who learns together? Who does not learn together?
- What are the policies, practices and interactions that promote collaboration? What are policies, practices and interactions that reinforce barriers to collaboration?
- Why within the cultures of the school do some individuals/groups learn together? And, why are there barriers to some individuals/groups learning together?

(iii) Participation and diversity: recognition and acceptance within a school.

- Who is recognised and accepted as a person and by whom? Who is not recognised and accepted as a person and by whom?
- What are the policies, practices and interactions that promote recognition and acceptance? What are the policies, practices and interactions that form barriers to recognition and acceptance?
- Why within the cultures of the school are some individuals/groups recognised and accepted? And, why are there barriers to the recognition and acceptance of some individuals/groups?

The successful development of more participatory policies and practices requires a concomitant shift in school cultures

The relationship between participation and cultures is central to the development of either in a school. Regardless of existing processes of participation and barriers to participation, for a school to develop more participatory policies and practices there has to be a concomitant shift in its cultures. For example, attempts to increase participation through the implementation of new policy may not impact upon the realities of practice if the values and beliefs, held by some members, remain unsympathetic or apprehensive. At the same time, it may prove difficult to effect shifts in the cultures of a school without the introduction of new policies and practices.

The modification of the cultures of a school necessitates an understanding of their nature: that is, not only how they are constituted but also how they are reproduced and changed. However, whilst cultures are never static they are nevertheless relatively enduring and it is these apparently contradictory qualities that demand examination. They include:

- (i) Myths and stories created in a school
- (ii) Rituals and habits recurring in a school
- (iii) Members' perceptions of change and risk taking
- (iv) Interactions with external worlds
- (v) Changes effected from within
- (vi) Taking a long view, the pace of change

By examining these qualities of a school's cultures it is possible to identify barriers to change as well as factors which act as catalysts to change. They also help to reveal the support required by members of a school to help them accept, welcome and effect developments that will increase participation in their school.

School cultures are not easily modified and this resistance to change is a barrier to the development of more participatory policies and practices. However, school cultures can shift and, at times, may do so relatively quickly and profoundly. There have been dramatic changes in the cultures of UK maintained schools over the last two decades brought about by the legislation and advice of successive national governments, both Conservative and Labour. This clearly illustrates the interplay between changes in cultures and the development of policies and practices; whether to promote participation, for example through the introduction of an 'entitlement' curriculum, or to reinforce barriers to participation, for example through increased competition between schools. It is interesting to note how rapidly and decisively governments can effect changes to the cultures of schools. This suggests that if they chose, as a legislative priority, to make all schools more participatory then they could help to bring about the necessary shifts in cultures to ensure that accompanying policies and practices would be successfully implemented.

The heart of developing participation in schools (1): the nature of relationships formed within its cultures

Human relationships are at the heart of understanding and developing school cultures and processes of participation. Yet, they are rarely discussed when the policies and practices of a school are under review. To understand participation in schools it is essential to scrutinise the nature of the personal relationships formed between members within its cultures. This includes how individuals and groups are valued and devalued; which individuals and groups have power over others and how their power is used; how individuals and groups are subjected to processes of identification by others; how language is used to constrain or to support relationships and so forth.

Furthermore, to develop participation in schools not only must the centrality of personal relationships be acknowledged, but changes in the nature of those relationships must take place. As Fielding (1998) argues, in education *"the personal is not a kindly add-on, it is foundational"* (p.8). In a later work Fielding (2000) sets out his criteria for what he calls *"person-centred schools"*:

"Teaching subjects or getting results is only justifiable if it does actually help students to become better persons; motivation is at once ipsative, emulative and rooted in negotiation; that is to say, it not only appeals to the student's own best past performance, but also to the delight in the creativity and excellence of others, and is given meaning through a reciprocal commitment to dialogue and mutual respect as the driving force of educative encounter... in sum, the teacher operates as an educator of persons." (p.54)

This is not to promote a sentimental approach to education, in which expectations about success and achievement are suppressed, but to acknowledge that teaching and learning in schools take place within the context of human relationships. This requires that policies and practices are put into place which focus on getting to know students and staff and, through that greater knowledge, afford members of a school the dignity of equal worth. When the centrality of relationships in a school is understood then all aspects of participation can be developed: *access and learning together* as well as *recognition and acceptance of diversity*.

An analysis of my findings also highlight that the development of more participatory relationships can not ignore the emotional lives of individuals within a school and its cultures. These are partly formed by the 'ghosts' that members bring into school everyday as well as by the activities that take place within a school itself. Emotional responses help to shape and are shaped by a school's cultures. If feelings such as fear, humiliation, failure and anger are

ignored then barriers to participation are strengthened. Similarly, processes of participation can not be developed if pleasure, success, happiness and confidence are not valued and if respect, responsibility, kindness and commitment are not encouraged. The ordinariness of school life invokes all these emotions in students and staff.

In an article for the *Times Educational Supplement*, the writer Phillip Pullman examined the verbs which instruct students' activities at key stages one, two and three in the current Literacy Strategy documents. Amongst the seventy-two verbs he identified, which included 'predict', 'compare', 'identify' and 'negotiate', he notes that there is no mention at all of the verb to 'enjoy' or its equivalent (Pullman, 2002, p.22). Yet experience, as both teachers and learners, tells us that enjoyment lends meaning to learning. Whilst in India I was involved in a workshop which set out to develop an *Index for Inclusion* for countries of the south. Those attending agreed that "*schools and other learning centres should seek to promote the well-being of the whole learner*" and it was acknowledged that for this aim to be fulfilled, "*Learning should often be fun, joyful and accompanied by laughter*" (Booth and Black-Hawkins, 2001, p.40). I would add that these feelings should also accompany the experience of teaching.

The heart of developing participation in schools (2): responses to diversity within its cultures

Responses to diversity are also at the heart of understanding and developing school cultures and processes of participation. They permeate the organisational structures of a school, its policies, practices and daily interactions and are demonstrations of how individuals and groups are valued

and devalued by others. In this way, responses to diversity also have clear connections with the nature of relationships within a school. They reflect the values and beliefs of members of a school: their understandings of identity and belonging and notions of 'normal' and 'other' behaviours. They encompass all aspects of participation: *access and learning together*, as well as the *recognition and acceptance* of members of a school.

By scrutinising key policies and practices, such as a school's admissions policy, organisational arrangements for teaching groups or provision for students who are perceived as requiring additional support, it is possible to reveal the underlying values and beliefs which increase participation and/or strengthen barriers to participation in a school. The process of examination itself, however, must also be participatory by drawing on a diversity of perspectives, including those of students, if gaps between rhetoric and reality are to be exposed.

Responses to diversity are about how resources are mobilised to support participation (Booth *et al*, 2000). Such decisions are also demonstrations of values held within a school and the different levels of worth ascribed to members. They too should be scrutinised. Even within the constraints of finite resources and government legislation there are still choices for schools to make. When resources are limited, it is crucial that the most vulnerable members of a school are identified and that resources are directed at minimising barriers to their participation.

Participatory responses to diversity are not concerned with the assimilation of members of a school. That is those approaches to diversity which:

"Reflect narrow views of normality, culture and achievement into which all students are expected to fit irrespective of ethnicity, gender, interests, background, sexuality, class, attainment and disability." (Booth, 2002)

Rather, differences are to be acknowledged, encouraged and welcomed because they contribute to the range of experiences, understanding and interests that make up the membership of a school. In this way Corbett (1999) misses the point when she asks:

"How can schools be really inclusive if they are containing so many disparate elements? Certain cultural values will necessarily dominate others, and some expressions of cultural allegiance will be curbed out of respect for others. Tensions are surely inevitable." (p.54)

This suggests an assimilationist's view and fails to recognise that participatory responses to diversity celebrate the *"many disparate elements"* in the cultures of a school not as *"a problem to be overcome, but as a rich resource to support the learning of all"* (Booth et al, 2000, p.12).

Some Reflections on Answering the Research Questions

In this chapter I have set out to answer my research questions, principally by analysing the findings from the case study of Bowden School but also by drawing on the reading and the *Autobiographical Tales* which together have informed the thesis. In Chapter One I argued that the primary purposes of research are to understand more clearly what is happening in schools and education and to use that greater knowledge to develop policies and practices. These notions of *understanding* and *development* are firmly established within my final research question, *'To what extent, can the concept of school cultures contribute to the understanding and development of participation in schools?'* The thesis has set out to explore ways in which the participation of all

members of a school may be increased within an overall aim of furthering of social justice.

By drawing on the case study of Bowden School I have used a single school to explore the study's central concepts of school cultures and participation. Even by including the five schools in the *Autobiographical Tales* I am aware that there are limitations to this approach; for example, all six schools in the thesis are English. However, when I presented a paper about Bowden School at a conference I was interested in the criticism it received from a member of the audience (Black-Hawkins, 1999). She suggested that my stories were typical of those that could be told of many schools. Despite her intentions, I found this observation reassuring. I have not set out to present Bowden School as special or different. Whilst at a simple level all schools are unique (Prosser, 1999) it is the typicality of the issues which the case study raises about school cultures and participation which makes it worth considering. And, this is reflected in the principal conclusions of the thesis. For the development of more participatory policies and practices in any school requires a concomitant shift in its cultures and at the heart of understanding and developing both is the nature of relationships amongst its members as well as their responses to diversity.

CHAPTER TEN

CLOSING THE THESIS

"I must not write THE END at the end."

"Why not?"

"Mrs Fuller says so."

This exchange took place recently between Katy Fletcher, aged eight, and myself at a school where I was making a parent-governor's visit. I had been asked to help the year three students write their literacy targets for the next half-term. Katy's choice was determined by being reprimanded by her teacher for finishing her writing with the words 'the end' in capital letters some ten centimetres in height. This dramatic flourish had pleased her as an act of closure to the story she had composed. As I write the final chapter of the thesis a part of me envies Katy her strong sense of completion. My study can not provide this degree of precision and finality. Katy has told her reader all there is to know about her plot and characters but mine are 'real' and their narratives continue to be played out.

This is a dilemma for those who research in schools. As Scott (2000) notes, *"The act of closure itself is part of the reality which the researcher is trying to describe"* (p.135). In the chapter on *Methodological Considerations* I argue that the deadline for producing a written thesis brings about an ending of sorts but one which is only partial. My interest in the relationship between school cultures and participation continues, as does my commitment to the furthering of social justice. Delamont (1992) argues that *"whatever one searches for, every project should bear within it the seeds of the next"* (p.186). The ceaseless nature of research is also its strength and its reward.

In this chapter I reflect on the study as a whole and in doing so offer some endings as well as some beginnings. The chapter is in three main sections. In the first I provide a summary of the principal conclusions of the thesis. In the second, I critique the study's methodology by highlighting some of its strengths as well as noting those aspects, which with hindsight, could have been improved. Finally, I make a number of recommendations for further research that would contribute to the development of the study. Together the three sections provide *an end* to the thesis although not *the end* to my research.

The Principal Conclusions of the Thesis

Figure 10:1 Principal conclusions of the thesis

- (i) The concept of school cultures is central to understanding participation in schools.
- (ii) Members' values and beliefs shape participation in schools.
- (iii) School cultures determine who does and does not participate, in what ways and why.
- (iv) The successful development of more participatory policies and practices requires a concomitant shift in school cultures.
- (v) At the heart of developing participation in schools (1) is the nature of relationships formed within its cultures.
- (vi) At the heart of developing participation in schools (2) are the responses to diversity within its cultures.

In Chapter Nine I discussed the findings from the case study of Bowden School, my reading and the *Autobiographical Tales* and in doing so formulated six principal conclusions. Figure 10:1 provides a summary of these. As the thesis indicates there are no 'quick fixes' to the cultures of school or to the processes of participation and barriers to participation within them. The emphasis of the study, as reflected in the conclusions, is that *development* comes through greater *understanding*.

A Critique of the Methodology

In reflecting on the study, there are aspects of the methodology that I now consider to be its particular strengths. I am also aware of methodological shortcomings, especially in relationship to the case study of Bowden School, where improvements could have been made. These principal strengths and shortcomings are summarised in Figure 10:2.

Figure 10:2 A critique of the methodology

(i) Methodological strengths of the study

- The role of autobiography in research
- The role of a learning support assistant as a participant observer
- The focus on one extended case study

(ii) Some suggestions for improving the study methodologically

- Gain a greater understanding of the perspectives of parents/carers
- Gain a greater understanding of local communities
- Make a more constructive research contribution to the school

Strengths: the role of autobiography in research

Despite my initial reservations, I now appreciate how valuable it was to include an autobiographical account of my experiences of education. The act of thinking, writing, reflecting and re-writing about my encounters with schools helped to make clearer what I already did and did not know about the key concepts of the thesis. This self-scrutiny allowed new ideas to be generated and existing ones to be challenged. It encouraged greater openness and clarity, for both myself and my readers, about my values as a researcher.

Through these processes, key themes emerged which then informed the case study of Bowden School and directed my reading. These include:

- (i) The role of a researcher as both an *insider* and an *outsider*.
- (ii) The interconnections between the private/personal and the social/political in understanding the relationship between cultures and individuals.
- (iii) The notion of *ghosts in the classroom*, both for students and members of staff.
- (iv) The impact of *external worlds* on the cultures of a school
- (v) The significance of relationships between members of a school in understanding its cultures and processes of and barriers to participation.
- (vi) The significance of responses to student diversity as demonstrations of how learners are valued and devalued within the cultures of a school.

Strengths: the role of a learning support assistant as a participant observer

Being a participant observer at Bowden School, in the role of an LSA, was a particularly advantageous way of developing my understanding of the key

concepts of the study. Both school cultures and participation touch on all aspects of school life and as a researcher I required access to a school which allowed me to explore its formal policies and practices as well as the everyday interactions that take place between members.

Being an LSA fulfilled these demands for the following reasons:

- (i) Students and staff accepted my presence in all areas of the school including classrooms, staffroom, canteen, playgrounds and so forth.
- (ii) I had access to a wide range of teaching and learning in terms of student groups, teachers, curriculum areas and teaching materials.
- (iii) I had access to a wide range of non-classroom based activities such as staff meetings, professional development days, sports days and staff celebrations as well as school documentation.
- (iv) I experienced being a member of a department and participating in its professional and social activities.
- (v) I was able to experience, for the first time, being a member of staff whose position and authority in a school was not that of being a teacher.

Strengths: focusing on one extended case study

As I explained in Chapter Two, *Methodological Considerations*, it was not my intention originally to focus so much of the study on a single school; for example, I had expected to visit a primary school in Norway. However, I now consider that concentrating mainly on one school is a major strength of the thesis. This is because of the complex nature of the key concepts of school cultures and participation. By working at Bowden School for six months I was able to consider them in depth and doing so seems more appropriate to the study than researching a greater number of schools but less intensely. I had

time not only to explore Bowden's cultures but also to experience directly being included and excluded from different aspects of its life as any other member might be. Finally, I also believe that issues raised by Bowden School have meaning beyond the particular, as shown in the study's principal conclusions summarised in Figure 10:1.

Suggested improvements: Gain a greater understanding of the perspectives of parents/carers

I would have liked to have gained a greater understanding of the perspectives held by parents/carers of Bowden School. I recognise that they provide a rich source of knowledge about a school as well as a range of perspectives that may well be different from those of other members. They also help to shape the cultures of a school as well as experiencing processes of participation and barriers to participation with regards to their involvement in their children's education. However, I was not able to interview or to meet informally as many parents/carers as I had hoped: the reasons for this have already been outlined in Chapter Two. I only had access to those who were also members of staff which, whilst useful, did not provide as wide a range of perspectives as possible. I consider that all four chapters on Bowden School would have been improved by greater contact with parents/carers and in particular Chapter Six, *Interacting with External Worlds* and Chapter Seven, *Forming Relationships within a School*. The former would have benefited from a fuller discussion of the role of parents/carers in the section, *Ghosts in the Classroom: Students*. The latter would have gained from the inclusion of a section on relationships between staff and parents/carers.

Suggested improvements: Gain a greater understanding of local communities

I would have liked to have explored the perspectives of other members of Bowden School's local communities, of which parents/carers form only one part. Once again I was reliant on talking to members of staff who lived locally, although students were also a useful source of information. I got to know the local area, using its shops and pubs and visiting staff in their homes. However, my approach lacked the structure necessary to gain a real understanding of a range of local people's perceptions of the school.

With hindsight I think the study would have benefited if I had talked to governors of Bowden School, members of local primary schools, religious groups, police, the local education authority, social services and so forth. In this way I would have understood better the extent to which members of the school's local communities shape its cultures as well as the ways in which local people are encouraged and discouraged from participating in the school's activities and facilities. Such insights would have informed all four chapters of the case study.

Suggested improvements: Make a more constructive research contribution to the school

The research activities that take place in a school should contribute constructively to members' experiences in some way: they should make a difference. Yet, apart from providing LSA support, this did not happen at Bowden School. In Chapter Nine I explained that although some staff were interested informally in what I found out about the school: neither the headteacher, nor the head of the learning support department wanted any formal feedback. They were grateful for the help I provided in classrooms but

they did not see my research as being of value to them. This is a limitation of the study. Whatever shortcomings it might have, I believe members of Bowden School would have benefited from engaging in some form of discussion about the findings of my thesis.

Methodologically, this is partly related to my dual role of student-researcher and LSA. Both of these positions lack power and therefore the knowledge I have of the school was not, I think, particularly valued. It may also be that I succeeded so well in maintaining the latter role that the former became obscured. Certainly, being an LSA impacted on the two suggested improvements noted above. In this role I could not easily demand that arrangements be made for me to interview parents or to meet members of local communities. If I compare this with my current position, as a senior research associate at a university, the contrast is marked. I am currently working on a research project involving seven schools. I am able to make any number of demands on these schools because they want to be researched and I have the authority of an academic position to support me.

Recommendations for Further Research

This section comprises a number of recommendations for additional research that would contribute to the further development of the thesis. These are summarised in Figure 10:3. I make two suggestions for further research which would extend the case study of Bowden School. The first focuses on Bowden whilst the second explores other schools in the local education authority. I then offer three further recommendations for research which would go beyond

the case study so as to extend the thesis to schools in other settings and contexts.

Figure 10:3 Recommendations for further research

(i) Extending the case study of Bowden School

- Return to Bowden School in five, ten, twenty years' time
- Set up comparable studies in other Markston schools

(ii) Extending beyond the case study of Bowden School

- Study a rural secondary school
- Study a school under 'special measures'
- Study a school outside the UK context

Return to Bowden School in five, ten, twenty years' time

By returning to Bowden School over a period of time I would be able to map shifts within its cultures as well developments in processes of participation and barriers to participation taking place within them. This is particularly important because of the sustained but changeable nature of both sets of concepts. As I note in Chapter Nine, although I worked at the school for six months and visited it over a period of eighteen months this was insufficient time to identify lasting changes and the reasons underlying them.

Set up comparable studies in other Markston schools

I would also like to set up case studies, comparable to the one undertaken at Bowden, in other Markston schools. This would provide a deeper understanding of the interactions between neighbouring schools and their impact on each other's cultures. I would particularly like to focus on those

schools which already have a place in the thesis: the Cathedral, a local primary school and the secondary school that is under threat of closure because of falling rolls. I would like to compare the perceptions of these schools' cultures, which I have already gathered from members of Bowden School, with those of their own members.

A case study of the Cathedral School would also allow me to examine the impact of being a 'faith' school on its cultures and the processes of participation and barriers to participation taking place within it. The current government intends to increase the number of such schools because they perceive them as supporting a set of values and beliefs which they consider likely to raise students' standards (DfES, 2001). I would like to examine what this might mean in practice.

By setting up a case study of one of Bowden School's local primary schools I would be able to compare possible differences between the cultures of primary and secondary schools. I would also be able to explore the impact of the size of a school on its cultures and processes of participation and barriers to participation. In particular I am interested in how size might affect the nature of the relationships formed between members of a school and how this in turn helps to shape its cultures.

Study a rural secondary school

In my *Autobiographical Tales* I describe how Shelbourn Village College, with its natural catchment area, had little other direct competition for students. Also, partly because of its rural location, the college facilities were seen as belonging to the whole community and not just to staff and students. These are very

different circumstances from, not only Bowden School, but also all the other secondary schools described in the thesis. Therefore, I would like to explore in more detail what difference the urban/rural context has on the cultures of a school and the processes of participation and barriers to participation taking place within it.

Study a school under 'special measures'

Throughout the thesis I have emphasised the static nature of school cultures: that changes only take place slowly over time. However, this does not fit the model used by the government when a school is put under 'special measures' following a critical Ofsted inspection (Ofsted, 1998). Then procedures are put into place which are intended to bring about rapid developments. I would like to study such a school to examine how far real differences can be made that address the deeply held values and beliefs existing amongst its members. For example, in these circumstances sometimes a large turnover of staff is involved and it would be worthwhile exploring to what extent such changes could be described as creating a *new* school and cultures rather than simply modifying the existing ones.

Study a school outside the UK context

As I have explained, I had intended to visit a primary school in Norway as part of the study. I had hoped that this would provide me with insights, not only about the impact of a different national context on the cultures of a school but also, by creating distance, add to my understanding of the UK context. Although the trip to Norway was cancelled I later visited six schools in India as part of an UNESCO project (Booth and Black-Hawkins, 2001). The time spent

in each school was brief and I would not argue that my knowledge of them was anything but superficial. However, the experience provided a different lens through which I could reflect upon my understanding of all schools. Therefore, I would welcome the opportunity to extend this thesis by a more structured and thorough study of a school outside the UK.

Last Words: Understanding and Developing the Research Process

In writing this thesis I have examined the complexity of not only the relationship between the concepts of school cultures and participation, but also of the research process itself. I have considered carefully the structure of the thesis and in doing so have deliberately chosen to put aside the usual staged approach of first literature, then methodology and finally empirical work. By presenting my methodological considerations at the beginning of the thesis I have been able to make explicit what I did, how and why, in terms of the study as an integrated whole, including a discussion of the methodology of my reading activities. The autobiographical chapter, based around my past experiences of schools and education, may also not be typical of doctoral theses. However, my findings from the *Autobiographical Tales* have reverberated throughout the entire study, informing both its methodologies as well as my understanding of its central concepts.

Each part of the thesis is connected and has contributed to the rest. In Chapter One I described the process of its construction as being like:

"A spiral over time: changing direction as new ideas have been examined, incorporated into the study and then later enlarged, reduced and/or dismissed".

Whilst writing for and thinking about the thesis another image has also come to mind. It is no coincidence that 'yarn' has its double meaning of story telling as well as that of a thread which can be knotted but may also be untangled and then used to create something new. In each chapter I have told part of the research narrative and in doing so I have set out not only to unravel its interconnecting threads but also to weave them together. My intention throughout has been to construct a thesis in which there is integrity of purpose and understanding both within and between its methodological approaches and its conceptual development.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: BOWDEN SCHOOL

1. Questions covered in all staff interviews
2. David Roberts: headteacher, teaches English and lives locally
3. Mary Butler: deputy headteacher, 'named person' for 'special educational needs' provision, teaches English/learning support and lives locally
4. Harry Hopkins: deputy headteacher, teaches history
5. Sandra Stephens: teaches design and technology, lived locally as a child and continues to do so, has worked at Bowden for twenty-six years, coordinates the 'alternative curriculum'
6. Laura Clark: head of house, teaches music
7. Philip Cleary: head of the learning support department, teaches physical education
8. Jane Lee: senior LSA, lives locally, chose not to send her children to the school
9. Carol Marina: LSA, lived locally as a child and continues to do so, daughter attends the school
10. Joanna York: LSA lived locally as a child and continues to do so, two sons attend the school
11. Eleanor Wharton: head of language support team
12. Year thirteen students

1. Questions covered in all staff interviews

1. Describe your role: job title, length of service, specific responsibilities, extra-curricular involvement, etc?
2. Describe the school. How would you describe it to a new member of staff? What is good about the school? What is less good? What are its strengths and weaknesses from your point of view?
3. How do you think the students view Bowden? Parents? Members of the local community?
4. What have you particularly enjoyed about working here? What have you not enjoyed so much? What would you like to change?
5. Describe the school when you first came here? How has it changed? Why do you think those changes have taken place? (National, local pressures?) Have they been beneficial or detrimental? For all or some?
6. In the Governing Body's statement of aims the comprehensive status of the school is emphasised. Is this something with which you feel comfortable? Is Bowden suitable for all students or are there some students who do not really benefit from being here? Who are these students? Where should they go? Are there students who do not come to Bowden at present but should? Are some students more worthy than others? Are some students valued more than others? Which? By whom? And why?
7. What is the role of the learning support department? How helpful have you found it? How else might this department help you and/or students?
8. What is the role of the language support team? How helpful have you found it? How else might this team help you and/or students?
9. There are policies in place about equal opportunities and bullying? Are they effective policies? What happens in practice?
10. What do you think of the House system? Is it supportive for students? All students? And the use of mixed aged tutor groups?
11. Is the school supportive of staff? In your experience have you had support professionally? Personally?

2. David Roberts: headteacher, teaches English, lives locally

1. The *Staff Handbook* states that one of your responsibilities is "school ethos" Can you describe to me what you mean by school ethos? And what is your role in developing it?
2. You are responsible for "community" links? What is the relationship between Bowden and its local community? How would you like to see that develop? How might this be connected to "school ethos"?
3. You are responsible for "PR and publicity". What is your role here? How might this too be connected to your notions of "school ethos" and "community"?
4. Has Bowden a natural catchment area? What is competition like with other schools? Is there a middle-class element that opt for other schools? Are school numbers up or down? How do you think members of the local community view the school?
5. Are there any selection criteria for a place in the school (attainment, behaviour or disability)? How does this compare with other local schools?
6. The *Staff Handbook* states that your key focus is "whole school policy and overall strategic planning". What have been your main concerns in these areas since being at the school? What do you consider to be your priorities for future development?
7. What affect, if any, has Markston becoming a unitary authority had on Bowden? And in the future what difference might it make?

3. Mary Butler: deputy headteacher, 'named person' for 'special educational needs' provision, teaches English/learning support and lives locally

1. You are responsible for the timetable. Can you explain how the school is organised? What use is made of groupings and settings, for which subjects and years? How are students grouped within the school (within and between classes)? How, and by whom, is this decided? What are the advantages and disadvantages? For whom?
2. You are also "Key Stage 3 coordinator" - what does this involve?
3. You are responsible for "intake testing" - is this the London Reading test? For what are the results used?
4. The *Staff Handbook* states you are involved in the school's "behaviour policy"? What is your role? Describe the policy to me? How has it changed since you've been here? What further developments would you like to see take place?
5. You are responsible for "primary schools liaison". Describe what this entails. (Include here generic questions about how community views Bowden.) Has Bowden a natural catchment area? What is competition like with other schools? Is there a middle-class element that opt for other schools?
6. What does being the school's 'named person' entail? How does this fit into Philip's job?

4. Harry Hopkins: deputy headteacher, teaches history

1. Could you tell me about the system of *Rewards and Sanctions* as set out in the *Staff Handbook*? How was it set up? Why were these particular policies were chosen? By whom?
2. How successful is the system? Does it work with all students? What works particularly well? Less well? Are staff consistent and with all students? What might you change? Why? Good and bad examples?
3. Go through sheet in *Staff Handbook* "reinforcing expectations". Tell me about these different sanctions. Which "privileges or opportunities" might be withdrawn from a student? Example? What might an "agreed contract" be like? Example? How might governors be involved? Example?
4. Go through sheet in *Staff Handbook* "rewarding achievement". Tell me about these different rewards. What works particularly well? Examples? What might you change? Examples? Do "stickers" make a difference? How long has this system been operating? "Gold Cards"? Years 10 and 11 draws: explain how they work? What are prizes? Are the students who are rewarded most frequently those students who would be most likely to behave appropriately anyway?
5. Are the policies in place about anti-bullying and anti-harassment effective? What happens in practice? How often are incidents of bullying, violence, harassment reported in the school? Are there recognisable patterns (racial, gender, sexual orientation)? May I see the "Violence Log"? And the "Harassment Log"?
6. Are there parallel documents to those in the *Staff Handbook* for students and/or parents? For example, on bullying?
7. In the *Staff Handbook* there is an emphasis on maintaining a school which is "well ordered and calm", "a controlled and calm school" (twice), "a calm and ordered environment". Why is this? Has the need for this emphasis changed since you first came here? Is it particular to Bowden?
8. Is the school supportive of staff? In your experience have you had support professionally? Personally? How about staff behaviour? Bullying of students? Other staff? Policies? Practices? Examples?

5. Sandra Stephens: teaches design and technology, lived locally as a child and continues to do so, has worked at Bowden for twenty-six years, coordinates the 'alternative curriculum'

1. Sense of history of the school and how it might have developed and changed over the last twenty-six years. How old is the school? What was it like when you first came here? As a secondary modern school? How do you think the school may have changed since then? How about when it became a comprehensive? Have students changed? Have staff changed?
2. Why do you think those changes might have taken place? (National, local, Bowden pressures?) Have they been beneficial or detrimental? For all or some? Who?
3. Has your job changed? How? Why?
4. You live in the catchment area. How do you think members of the local community view the school? Has that local view changed over the last years? Why do some students go to other schools?
5. Tell me in more detail about your current teaching commitment. What year groups do you teach? (years 8, 9, 10, 11, I think). Are classes mixed ability or set in Design and Technology? Do these arrangements work? For everyone?
6. What is the "alternative curriculum"? Who is it for? How are students chosen? What do they do? A successful story about a student? A less successful story?

6. Laura Clark: head of house, teaches music

1. Tell me about being head of house and the house system generally. In the *Staff Handbook* you are described as being "like a headteacher of a small school". Is that an accurate description? What are your key responsibilities? How can you support students? Their parents/carers? Staff in your house? What is your relationship with external agencies?
2. Do mixed aged tutor groups and houses work? Compared with a year based system? Advantages? Disadvantages?
3. Why did you apply for the post? Have you enjoyed it? A story about a student who you helped? A less successful story?
4. Who supports you when things don't go so well (parental complaints, etc.)?
5. Tell me about the House Council and the School Council. How are they structured? Who chooses how they are run? Do they make a difference? A good story? A less successful one?
6. Tell me in about your current teaching commitment. What year groups do you teach? (years 7, 8, 9, 13, I think. Are classes set in music at any stage? Does mixed attainment work? For everyone? There seems to be a departmental teaching style. Is this an accurate description? Departmental syllabus? Is this supportive? Or would you like more flexibility?
7. There are two periods of music in year 7: I have seen "group theory" and "individual keyboard". What else? Singing? Improvisation with other instruments? Group performance?
8. Do you live in the catchment area? What do members of the local community think of the school? Also parents (as head of house)? Why do some local students go to other schools?

7. Philip Cleary: head of the learning support department, teaches physical education

1. Tell me the history of the learning support department. How has it developed? How do you see it changing in the future?
2. How are students who experience difficulties identified? At the beginning of year 7? And as they progress through the school?
3. How do you think students feel about being singled out? For example, reading and maths workshops? Or the presence of an LSA?
4. What are the implications for the department when teaching groups are mixed attainment? And when set?
5. Do all teachers take responsibility for all students? If not, what are their expectations of your department? How do you support staff to encourage them to try out different / more appropriate teaching approaches?
6. How far is the department part of the rest of the school? How far is it seen as separate? How far do you think LSAs are included as full members of staff? In what ways are they not? And by whom? How about when a teacher is offering support? Is that seen by staff as equal in worth to a subject teacher?
7. Do you think staff welcome the emphasis your department places on students who are experiencing difficulties or do you think there is sometimes resentment about the amount of effort which goes into supporting them? What do you think?
8. Tell me in more detail about your current teaching commitment. What year groups do you teach? (years 8, 9, 11, I think). Are classes mixed ability? Do these arrangements work? For everyone?

8. Jane Lee: senior LSA, lives locally

1. How long have you lived in Bowden's catchment area? What did you know about the school before you started here?
2. What did you find out about the school which surprised you once you started working here? Has the school changed since you started here?
3. How do you think members of the local community view the school?
4. You have two sons but neither of them came to Bowden School? Why was that? Would you send them here now?
5. Your position as an LSA. Do you think staff make good use of you? When have they? A successful story? Why? When have they not? A less successful story? Why?
6. How far is the learning support department part of the rest of the school? How far is it seen as separate? How far do you think LSAs are included as full members of staff? In what ways are they not? And by whom?
7. Do you think staff welcome the emphasis the department places on students who are experiencing difficulties or do you think there is sometimes resentment about the amount of effort which goes into supporting them? What do you think?
8. Tell me about your role as a senior LSA?

9. Carol Marina: LSA, lived locally as a child and continues to do so, daughter attends the school

1. How long have you lived in Bowden's catchment area? What did you know about the school before you or your daughter started here?
2. How do you think members of the local community view the school?
3. How long has your daughter been at the school? Why did you choose it? What were the other choices?
4. What do you think about the school as a parent? What has pleased you? Has there been things about the school which have concerned you? What?
5. What about working here? What did you find out about the school which surprised you once you started working here? Has the school changed since you started here?
6. Your position as an LSA. Do you think staff make good use of you? When have they? A successful story? Why? When have they not? A less successful story? Why?
7. How far is the learning support department part of the rest of the school? How far is it seen as separate? How far do you think LSAs are included as full members of staff? In what ways are they not? And by whom?
8. Do you think staff welcome the emphasis the department places on students who are experiencing difficulties or do you think there is sometimes resentment about the amount of effort which goes into supporting them? What do you think? As an LSA? As a parent?

10. Questions for Joanna York: LSA, lived locally as a child and continues to do so, two sons attend the school

1. How long have you lived in Bowden's catchment area? What did you know about the school before you or your sons started here?
2. How do you think members of the local community view the school?
3. How long have your sons been at the school? Why did you choose it? What were the other choices?
4. What do you think about the school as a parent? What has pleased you? Has there been things about the school which have concerned you? What?
5. What about working here? What did you find out about the school which surprised you once you started working here? Has the school changed since you started here?
6. Your position as an LSA. Do you think staff make good use of you? When have they? A successful story? Why? When have they not? A less successful story? Why?
7. How far is the learning support department part of the rest of the school? How far is it seen as separate? How far do you think LSAs are included as full members of staff? In what ways are they not? And by whom?
8. Do you think staff welcome the emphasis the department places on students who are experiencing difficulties or do you think there is sometimes resentment about the amount of effort which goes into supporting them? What do you think? As an LSA? As a parent?

11. Eleanor Wharton: head of the language support team

1. Describe the role of the language support team in the school?
2. How are students identified as being able to benefit from your support?
What support do you offer? How do staff respond to your involvement?
3. What are your links with the learning support department?
4. Refer to *Staff Handbook*, (p.11) Tell me about the three areas in which you work?
 - (i) "Working alongside teachers" – What are staff's expectations of the language support team?
 - (ii) Promoting "bilingual students as a positive resource in a multi-ethnic school" – Is this a view that staff share? Do they actively support this in their lessons?
 - (iii) Improving links with the home and wider community" – What links do you have? How might they be improved?
5. How included are the students with which you work in the life of the school? Academically? Socially? Inside and outside school?
6. What part does racism play in the lives of students and staff?
7. Do the students you support generally live in the catchment area for Bowden?

12. Year Thirteen students

1. Background information – Did you start in year seven? If not when did you come to the school? Which subjects are you studying? A' levels? GNVQs? What else? What are you hoping to do when you leave school this summer?
2. Tell me about Bowden School. How would you describe it to someone just about to join the sixth moving here from another area? What is good about the school? Give stories/ examples. What is less good about it? Give stories/ examples.
3. What do you remember about your first days at Bowden? What stories had you heard about the school? Were you worried about coming? Were you excited?
4. How you think the school may have changed since then? Why do you think those changes might have taken place (national/local/Bowden pressures)?
5. Is it different being in the sixth form? In what ways? Relationships with staff? With other students? Methods of working?
6. What do your parents think about the school? How might they describe it? Why did you and your parents choose this school?
7. How do you think neighbours living nearby view the school? Did some of your friends at primary school not come here? Why do you think that was? Where did they go? Why do you think they opted for this/those school(s)?
8. Bowden describes itself as a comprehensive school meaning it is open for all local children to attend. Is Bowden really suitable for all students or are there some students you know, or remember, who do/did not really benefit from being here? Who are these students? Where should they go?
9. Do you think this is a good school? in what ways? How could it be improved?
10. Your tutor is a member of the learning support department and your tutor room is in the learning support centre. What do you think is the role of the learning support department? What do they do? Stories from own experience or seeing other students being supported? Do you have / have you had support from the department? Did you / have you found it helpful?
11. What do you think of the House system? Is it supportive for students? All students? And the use of mixed aged tutor groups?
12. Rewards and punishments? When you were in years seven to eleven did you like to get stickers and gold cards? Did these systems work for all

students? Were teachers consistent? Does the punishment system work?
Have you been punished?

13. Are the policies in place about bullying and harassment effective? What happens in practice?